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THE
MYSTERY OF EDUCATION

THE MYSTERY OF EDUCATION

AND OTHER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCES

BY

BARRETT WENDELL

Professor of English at Harvard College

NEW YORK

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CONTENTS

I

PAGE

OF THESE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCES . 3

II

THE MYSTERY OF EDUCATION . . . 9

III

THE STUDY OF LITERATURE . . . 81

IV

THE STUDY OF EXPRESSION 137

V

EDGAR ALLAN POE 197

VI

DE PRÆSIDE MAGNIFICO 256

190871

I

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I

OF THESE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCES

Since the beginning of this year 1909 I have been called on no less than five times to speak before audiences gathered together on occasions of academic solemnity. Such performances are not quite cheerfully portentous either for us who take part in them or for those who are obliged to sit at our feet. Neither can quite avoid an underlying assumption that they will result in little more than fresh demonstrations of the hapless futility of sermons. Yet, after all, few circumstances can more clearly challenge one to do one's best.

This thought has encouraged me to gather together the results of these occasional labours. They need little, if any, comment. All deal with matters closely connected with American university life. All but one were fully written down, as well as I could write them, for the purpose of sure delivery. It has, therefore, seemed best to send them forth just as they were given; and, in finally writing the address which I had delivered from notes last year in Chicago, and repeated, in April, with various modifications, at Brown University, to adhere, as nearly as I could, to its original form. The precise occasion for which each of these performances was prepared is stated at the beginning of each. I need add only that the Phi Beta Kappa poem, given at Harvard College, is my first attempt to express myself publicly in verse; and

that I am consequently reminded of a rhyme uttered some years ago by a friend who found himself in a similar literary predicament:

"Poeta nascitur, non fit—
And that's the very deuce of it."

II

THE MYSTERY OF EDUCATION

An Address before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Johns Hopkins University, 24 April, 1909

II

THE MYSTERY OF EDUCATION

Mr. President, and Members of the Phi Beta Kappa Society:

Of all the honours which can come to an American man of letters, none is more insidiously flattering than such an invitation as yours; for the sum and substance of a Phi Beta Kappa orator's message must always be the expression of his own opinion—a matter generally and relentlessly assumed of interest only to himself. Invited to give it to others, his first acknowledgment of the privilege must be the expression of humble and hearty thanks to those whose goodness and loving-

kindness have afforded him the opportunity. His next must be the perplexing inquiry of what range of opinion to set forth. Things in general offer an inconveniently extensive field of observation. Some corner thereof, not too highly illuminated, must evidently be sought; and if that corner chance to be habitually a lurking-ground of his hearers, as well as of his own, so much the better for everybody. This line of exploration has brought me, without much hesitation, to a region familiar to us all. Your generous summons has called me from the eldest conservatory of education in our country to gladden, or sadden, a passing hour in the history of its most luxuriant seminary. I shall make no further apology for inviting your attention to some opinions of mine concerning the Mystery of Education.

For education, as we know it nowadays, is indisputably a mystery, in the full, baffling sense of that fascinatingly ambiguous word. It is the occupation, the trade if you will, the *métier* or *mestier* or *ministerium*, with which the waking lives of most of us are concerned; and, furthermore, there hovers about it, impalpable but certain, some such quivering atmosphere of filmy, phantasmagoric glamour as made unearthly to profane eyes the vanished and impenetrable mysteries of primal Greece.

What these were, one begins to wonder; and, if one be old enough to have experienced the obstacles to culture presented by despairingly thumbed pages of Liddell and Scott, one turns, if only from schoolboy habit, to see what they have to say about it. Μυστήριον is there, safe and sound; it

proves to mean nothing more nor less than *mystery*—the kind of thing immemorially practised at Eleusis, and still perhaps vital to the being of those among our fellow-citizens who enjoy describing themselves by knightly titles, and walking about in fantastically uniformed processions. But the saving grace of Liddell and Scott is an absorbing passion for getting at the roots of things, if they can. So a parenthesised reference leads us straight from Μυστήριον to Μύστης—which fragment of musty lore turns out to signify *one initiated.* Even though still nowhere, we may feel, we are beginning to start on the road somewhere. A mystery clearly involves initiation; and initiation implies that, if the mystery is to persist, somebody—and, in all likelihood, almost everybody—has got to be left out. Furthermore, to revert to Liddell

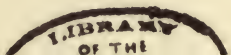
and Scott, the very existence of the substantive Μύστης hangs on that of the verb Μυέω—*to initiate;* and this calls to mind the obvious truth that in order to initiate anybody into anything there must always be somebody else to perform the process of initiation. What manner of somebody this may be, Liddell and Scott finally proceed to intimate. Μυέω—*to initiate*—they derive from Μύω, where they leave us; and Μύω they define "to close, to shut; especially of the lips and eyes, *to wink.*" Μύω seems elemental, at least so far as Liddell and Scott go; according to them, it is derived from nothing short of the heart of nature. Wherefore, perhaps, they freely permit themselves that beautifully imaginative pregnancy of definition. As one puts aside the exhausted volume, one can hardly help reflecting that if we keep our lips closed

and solemnly wink at one another, nobody else need ever know that we do not know all about it.

Some of us do, perhaps; beyond question a good many of us talk as if they did, and write, and publish, until less confident heads begin to swim with the sad self-consciousness of comparative ignorance. Of a few facts we can happily feel sure. This Education—with a fine, big capital E—is doubly a mystery: it is not only a trade or occupation, but, as I pointed out a good many years ago, it is such an object of faith in these United States of America, and perhaps everywhere else in this twentieth century of the Christian Era, that we may fairly regard it as a cult, almost as a religion. Those of us who, for better or worse, are called on, so far as may be in our power, to preserve and to guide it, are charged with

an office almost priestly. Harvard is not only a conservatory nor Johns Hopkins only a seminary; both are sanctuaries. Membership of the Phi Beta Kappa consequently has its grave side as well as its happy; for it marks one special degree of initiation into a mystery held peculiarly reverend in our own time and country.

So long as reverence preserves a mystery, initiates of any degree may rest content. In any venerable mystery, however—trade or cult—one great virtue has always been difficulty of access. Those who are not admitted to its secrets, never quite sure of what the secrets are, hold them in awful respect. Even though the secrets themselves be trivial or outworn, too, the fact that whoever attains them must work vigilantly, and bear sharp scrutiny makes the mere attainment a token of



power; for the masters are thus chosen by a pitiless process of selection—a process favourable to the quality of man or beast. The moment the process of selection begins to relax, though,—the moment people begin to attain something which looks like initiation without arduous effort, vigorous concentration, devoted self-sacrifice,—the great safeguard of any mystery begins to weaken; the mystery itself, indeed, is threatened with dissipation. Now, to my mind, this reverend mystery of ours is not at present so secure from dissipation as we are disposed comfortably to assume. A good many facts, at least, generally supposed to be tokens of its enduring strength, may certainly be presented rather in the light of something like symptoms of disease.

The unprecedented extension of popular education at public expense, for ex-

ample, is magnificently generous. We are proud of our free schools, primary, secondary, and technical; of our free universities, and of our philanthropic schemes for bringing academic degrees by rural delivery to the doors of labourers, and their sons and their daughters. All the same, nobody can deny that this process does a good deal to make easy what used to be hard, and thus to impair its moral value. Again, something similar is true of our public library system. When to learn German in Massachusetts a subsequently eminent scholar had to import both his text and his dictionary, he knew that they were precious tools, with which he set to work heroically and successfully. Nowadays, when everybody can have such things for nothing, people seem generally disposed to regard them only as tiresome playthings. Still again, when

school books had to be bought, the children who owned them—or at worst the parents of such children—were reminded, if only by the demand on their pockets, that books are, or ought to be, objects of value. In these new times, when every public school throughout our country provides free text-books as well as free instruction, the pauperization of learning has gone so far that you can hardly persuade well-to-do undergraduates at our older colleges to regard the expenditure of fifteen or twenty dollars a year for books they must study as anything else than an imposition on your part, impelling them on theirs to wasteful extravagance.

Another and a different force at present tending to dissipate our mystery may perhaps give rise to more divergence of opinion; but whether you welcome it or deplore it, you can-

not neglect it. A century ago, education, generally confined to men, enjoyed the kind of respect which we have been accustomed, from eldest time, to associate with the conception of virility. At present the general practice of coeducation combines with the luxuriant growth of colleges, and the like, especially designed for women —who mature earlier than men, and consequently listen and recite somewhat more acceptably than normal males under the age of twenty-five—to produce a latent suspicion that education, if not learning, may soon prove something like what a sceptical Italian once pronounced the Catholic Church to be—*cosa eccellente per le donne.* On this point, two observations occur to me; according to divers authorities the presence of many women in any given kind of classes—such as those in English

literature—generally drives men, for self-protection, into other fields of culture; and one reason why may perhaps be shadowed in a somewhat frivolous comment on American manners lately made by an evidently unsympathetic observer—namely, that the regular feminine form of the word *cad* in the United States appears to be *co-ed.*

That this pleasantry, whatever you may think of its taste, is comprehensive, nobody would pretend. It brings instantly to mind, in contradiction, an incident said to have occurred not long ago at an American public school for girls. A skilful and devoted woman there had long maintained in her classes a high standard of instruction, attested by unflinchingly definite marks or grades. The story runs that a new superintendent disapproved her methods. If in a given class, for example,

no pupil displayed anything higher than mediocrity, no grades of special commendation were returned. The superintendent directed her thereafter to give the best pupil in any class the highest mark allowed by the scale—one hundred per cent., let us say—and to grade the others according to this fortuitous standard. The process he is understood to have believed encouraging to the unfortunate or the stupid. The teacher declined to obey him, conscientiously holding that a high grade ought to certify high scholarship. For this insubordination she was presently removed to a position of less dignity. In other words, she was severely disciplined for an attempt to maintain a definite standard of attainment. As a natural consequence, the reports of her successor indicated a gratifying improvement in the quality of pupils at

the school in question, which made almost everybody happier; and, as the good woman with unpractical ideals happened to die within the year, no harm has ensued to anybody or anything except this reverend mystery of ours. The benevolent lowering of standard has perhaps done something toward a local dissipation of its glamour.

Now whether such matters as these seem portentous of better days to come, or of worse, we can hardly deny that they concern us, so far as we are priests of the cult of education or initiates of its mystery. Very likely the mystery had grown too dense—some manner of dissipation may doubtless be good for it. We are bound to acknowledge, however, that a considerable process of dissipation is now going on, and therefore that we cannot prudently rely

much longer on the old formulas and rituals. Taking things at their very best, we cannot much longer rest assured that those who penetrate to our secrets must do so by an arduously selective process, and that those who linger outside will justly feel the courageous dignity of whoever finally wins his right to place therein. We have not lost our basic faith; we are beginning to perceive, however, that if our faith is to be sustained, we must understand it, and exemplify it, and assert it otherwise than in the past.

For one fact, I believe, we must candidly admit. At this moment more thought is given to education, more effort devoted to it, more expense lavished on it—of time and of energy as well as of unstinted gift, public and private—than ever before. Yet there is room for doubt whether the practical

result of it has ever been much less palpable. There are moods, indeed, when some of us must fall to wondering whether educational processes were ever before so indefinite in purpose, or quite so ineffectual.

This brings us to the question of what we mean by education. Without attempting precise definition, which might involve endless dispute, we may, perhaps, agree on two or three commonplaces, sufficient for our purpose. Man, to begin with, whether you take the word to mean the individual or the species, has the misfortune to be conscious. Sooner or later his consciousness makes him aware that, at least as he knows himself by any process as yet developed or devised, he is a thing surrounded by other things, or by something else. A convenient name for this inconvenient circumstance is

environment. Some of it, like his clothes, his friends and his enemies, is close at hand; some, like the Antarctic Pole, or the Moon, or the planets, or the stars, or space unfathomable and time without end, is vanishingly remote. There it is, however, everywhere about him, perceived and unperceived, inextricably intermingled, various, indefinite, infinite if you will, yet, so far as it surrounds man, a unit, in that it is not himself.

Now that innocent little adverb *not* implies one aspect of man's environment, from his point of view important. Whatever else *not* stirs in your mind, it cannot help reminding you of the uncomfortable fact that there is such a thing as contradiction. Environment, on the whole, contradicts man with a persistence sure at last to be fatal; for he generally suffers a good deal, and by

and by he dies. Meanwhile, as we have seen, he is conscious; and his consciousness manifests itself in thought, in speech, in work, in play, in behaviour. Thus he himself is part of the environment of the generations which have kindled to consciousness and faded into ashes before him, and of those destined to do so when his own little flame has flickered out. He is a torch-bearer, if you like the pretty old metaphor, carrying the gleam of life through the darkness of environment which must forever enshroud the instant concentrated in his allotted term of years. The better he carries his torch, the less flickering the light thereof, the happier he, the happier those to come, and the more content we may fancy the vanished fathers who have confided it to his passing care. Metaphor is perhaps leading us astray. Without its aid,

the while, we might hardly have understood so well as now what we mean by believing that man is at his best when best adjusted to his environment; and that the best means we know of helping him toward adjustment is our reverend mystery of education.

All of which, together with its vagueness, has a comfortable sound of precision. If we are at all right, the problem of education begins to look refreshingly simple. Ascertain what environment is, and what man is. State the consequent formula of adjustment in approximate terms;—we all admit that ultimate exactitude is beyond human power, but that we can practically get along without it. And there we are. We can hand over the formula to those who, even if slow to discover it, can probably use it as well as we. Thereupon we may devote our own energies to higher things.

When we begin to scrutinise environment, however, it turns out to be disconcertingly elusive. Take it scientifically, if you will: astronomy reveals to us a universe where everything is on the way from somewhere to somewhere else; so does geology; so does biology; so do history, and economics, and sociology, and physics, and chemistry. The fact is certain; the process is observable everywhere, in various phases, some of them unpleasantly explosive. These occasional explosions, particularly when they take place in the immediate neighbourhood of man, excite alert desire to know what they mean. In certain details, such as the arrangement of electric wires in the turrets of war ships, we can find out, and do something to mend matters; but generally we can only recognise things which blow us up as manifes-

tations of a fact which, for want of a better term, we are apt nowadays to describe as force. Nobody knows what it is; nobody knows why it exists; nobody knows whence it comes, or whither it goes; yet nobody can help admitting, the while, that every atom of human environment embodies it, more or less active or latent. In a single word, we can find no better definition of environment than by declaring it to be force. Which may not seem to help us much until we remind ourselves that thereby we assert it to be something never fixed, never at rest, always instinct with the protean movement of life.

Of all the manifestations of force which consciously affect man, none are more instantly palpable than such as involve his control over the animate, and still more the inanimate, conditions of nature. When he learned to

tame domestic animals, for example, his relation to environment manifestly changed; so, still more, it was changed by his discovery that he could subject to his use what he so long deluded himself by supposing to be the element of fire. The very terms by which we still describe remote ages of social development—the Age of Stone, the Age of Bronze, and so on—remind us of the old changes of environing force which demanded new adjustments to meet their unprecedented conditions.

By the time when man began to record himself, he was approaching what we call civilization, of which, in ultimate simplicity, the chief conditions seem to have been mastery of fire, of metal, of wheels, and of sails. The Egyptians had these, and the Homeric heroes; the Romans had little else; and until the Nineteenth Century there was

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not much else anywhere, except gunpowder and printing presses. Even under these fairly simple conditions, adjustment to environment was no child's play. Study thereof, and of its various misadventures, remains the chief occupation of traditional scholarship everywhere. In consequence, I remember few more pregnant hours than I passed, some dozen years ago, at the feet of a Harvard Phi Beta Kappa orator who pointed out that the Nineteenth Century—with its final mastery of steam and electricity—was really the beginning of a new ethnological epoch, as different from any of the earlier periods as that of metals was from that of chipped flints. The fact seems to me undeniable. Environment is now pressing on us under new conditions and at an unprecedented rate. It would have been comfortable to fol-

low the Harvard orator not only in his assertions but in his conclusions. Some of his hearers, however, seemed indisposed to agree without reserve that everything would always be all right if everybody should devote all his energy to the science or the art of engineering.

Environment nowadays—and, so far as any one now on earth is concerned, henceforth—proves to be not only force, but force in all the complexity of unprecedented epochal conditions, which nobody can pretend to understand. The only certain fact about it, at least to my thinking, is that on which I touched a moment ago. Throughout our lifetimes the rate at which it has moved has been swiftly accelerating. Think of anything you like as it was in the year 1900; or, better still, turn to what you wrote about any conditions surrounding you ten years ago.

You may count yourself a prophet if you find your experience much other than that of a friend of mine who lately read over some observations on contemporary England set down, to the best of his ability, in the last year of the Nineteenth Century. He found hardly a word to alter, he said; only, with old-age pensions grinning in his face, and Mr. Lloyd-George's Budget voted to meet them, the essay impressed him as a document from times as remote as those of the Tudors or the Plantagenets. Ten years hence, one may venture to guess, the conditions of to-day may well seem prehistoric. It is to nothing less than this environment of indefinitely accelerating force that modern education attempts to adjust man.

This first term of our problem thus proves rather less manageable than it

sounded. Contenting ourselves, however, with humble recognition that environment is accelerating force, we may now go on to consider what man is, whom we have got somehow to try to adjust to it. He is conscious, beyond question; and he has paid himself the compliment of describing his consciousness by the somewhat hyperbolic name of intelligence. We may grant, indeed, that whether he can really understand anything or not, he will always suppose that he can. Intelligent, therefore, we will call him for our momentary purpose of definition. Even more clearly, he is at once the product of certain natural forces—such as ancestors and history—and himself a source of similar natural forces, more or less destined to affect other people. He can beget children, preach sermons, make works of art, or trouble, or

mistakes. In other words, he can somehow accumulate force from his environment, and somehow radiate it thereto. For our purposes, I believe, we may best accordingly consider him as an intelligent focus of force.

That metaphorical definition has the baffling fault of immateriality; unless I am quite mistaken, a focus is only a point, with neither length, breadth, nor thickness to disturb its ethereal purity. To think any further, we need something a little more substantial. We may liken man, therefore, not to a focus pure and simple, but to the focal instrument most familiar to our everyday habits of mind—namely, a lens, such as gathers, and concentrates or disperses, rays of light. His relation to the force which he collects and radiates is something like that of an object-glass or of a burning-glass to the phase of force

which we now figure to ourselves in the guise of light-waves or heat-waves. The most important error in our simile is that man, as we conceive him, differs from a piece of glass or crystal in the matter of intelligence. However erroneous our notion may be proved by the sympathetically accelerated intelligence of times to come, we cannot yet habitually imagine the lens of commerce as flexibly and consciously sensitive, or as ever troubled with desire to know what it is about. Man, considered as a focal lens of force, on the other hand, is so troubled all the time, inevitably and rightly. Rightly, I say, because we shall hardly disagree that if his intelligence languish, he will neither gather nor radiate force with any but accidental effect, and yet that if his intelligence grow excessive it will somehow cloud or paralyze his focal powers. He has

never yet been at his ideal best; doubtless—to use a favourite phrase of old Increase Mather—he never will be until the second coming of Our Lord. He is nearest his ideal best when his intelligence and his focal powers, cumulative and radiatory alike, are most nearly balanced.

To illustrate what I have in mind, we may perhaps turn to a few examples of it. Somewhere in the work of John Stuart Mill, if I remember rightly, he points out the indisputable truth that, so far as man is concerned with material things, human activity may be reduced to the power of taking something from somewhere and putting it somewhere else. If, with this principle in mind, we turn our attention to a fine art, such as cookery or architecture, we shall soon come to agree that the best artists —the best cooks or the best architects

—are those who best know what to take and where to put it, and who are not troubled by hesitant indecision in the process. Eggs or spices, stone or wood or metal, lie ready at hand; so do fire and machines, ovens and engines and derricks. Æons of experiment have proved what can be done with them. Here are a few of the countless rays of force ready for concentration in the little human focus prepared to gather them. Let him use intelligence enough to gather them selectively, and half his work is done; if, meanwhile, his intelligence has served him to gather among them rays which the next man would have neglected, his half-done work is done in the manner sometimes called original and sometimes great.

If he is really to achieve anything, the while, let alone originality or greatness,

the other half of his focal task must be performed as well; he must put these ingredients or materials, which he has taken from somewhere, in the precise somewhere else where his intelligence leads him to suppose that they most happily belong. He must concentrate or radiate them into his own sauce, or his own cathedral. If he do this right, he has made them a new centre of force—bodily or spiritual, or both. Others than he will eat and give thanks, or kneel in adoration, and otherwise do their own focal work the better for his. If he do his work amiss, however, the sauce will be unsavory, the cathedral unstable or ugly, both useless, or at best short of the usefulness which might have been theirs. In such regrettable event, when you come to consider why things have gone wrong, you will generally find that it is either be-

cause he has gathered his material stupidly, or has used it stupidly, or has stopped to think how not to be stupid until he has unwittingly become more impotent than if he had not stopped to think at all. In other words, his intelligence and his focal powers have got out of balance.

Or take a more subtle instance, or at least a more complicated. Man, we all know, is a political animal; and nowadays he is hereabouts rather disquietingly active in this aspect. A good deal of our public conduct must turn on majority votes, cast for immensely various reasons, of self-interest, of patriotic or moral principle, of prejudice or invincible ignorance, or carelessness or of what presents itself to the voters in the light of intelligence. As American citizens, men—alone or collected—are tremendously focal centres of force.

On what they think, or on what they think that they think, about sundry matters must depend what they do, or at least what they try to do, about them. On what they really do, purposely or not, must considerably depend our national welfare.

At this moment, for example, certain general questions are in the air. Without venturing even to suggest answers, I shall ask you to agree that we shall hardly waste the little time demanded for reminding ourselves of the kind of political force at present environing us. Every one admits nowadays, as a general principle, that special privilege is objectionable; yet protected industries are honestly demanding what seems like special privilege to many of our citizens; and, with equal honesty, labour unions are demanding what seems equally like it to some others.

Again, a generally admitted principle asserts that direct taxation should fall proportionately on everybody, so that everybody may be aware of just what degree of legal imposition he is called on to bear. If there be an exception to this principle, it is that those who impose a direct tax should be willing to bear at least their full share of it; otherwise you have what has generally been called confiscation, to greater or less degree. Yet not only popular prejudice but the utterances of eminent statesmen and of far from radical newspapers are vigorously informing us that a graduated tax on inheritances and incomes—a tax which completely spares the majority, who are poor, and despoils the minority, who are rich—is obviously correct in principle.

Still again, and putting aside the predatory forces thus called to mind,

there is room for great difference of opinion concerning the proper function of legislation. To some it appears clear that no legislative act can be healthy, and probably that none can really be operative, which contradicts custom; equally respectable thinkers believe heart and soul in imposing righteousness on humanity by legislation. It is said that an American legislature once placed the Ten Commandments on a Statute Book by a considerable majority. It is certain that prohibitory legislation, theoretically contrary to the rights of the individual, and practically neglectful of the regular conduct of civilized mankind, commands wide approval, even if mitigated by narrow sympathy. The function of our courts is equally unsettled in the public mind. Some highly desirable citizens hold that the business of judges is to de-

fine and to maintain the law; others, of stainless patriotism, urge that if the law chance to be unpopular, or otherwise unacceptable, a judge who should maintain it probably deserves impeachment, and certainly ought to be defeated in case he hold his seat by popular vote and present himself for re-election. How these questions, and the numberless more which they may suggest, should be answered, we need not dispute. We shall agree, I hope, that man can answer them best when he can best perceive on the one hand what they mean, and on the other what consequences his answer will involve. In other words, political man, like man the artist—cook or architect—is at his best when his intelligence and his focal powers are most nearly balanced.

Now such balance is evidence of the nearest possible adjustment of man to

his environment—of our focal lens of force to the force amid which it lives out its little span of life; and to help toward some such adjustment is one chief function, as we have already seen, of this perplexing mystery of ours—the mystery of education, which we profess, and cherish, and revere. So far as we profess it, we must begin to feel, our work in this world has an aspect full of stimulus both imaginative and moral, which a good many of us—focally blind, if you will—are accustomed nowadays to neglect or to ignore. It cannot help affecting man—artist, political animal, and countless things else. It cannot help either stimulating or impairing his power of adjustment to his environment. We sometimes speak of the humanities as if they were a separate and almost negligible part of such work as is ours in this world. Techni-

cally, I will cheerfully grant you, they are; but only because we have confined the name to limits far more narrow than its meaning. Plays with words may obscure truth or conceal it; they can never avert it. Whether we will or not, the true office of education, from beginning to end, is irresistibly, tremendously, magnificently human.

When I touched on this point a little while ago, you may remember, I mentioned an opinion here and there held by serious observers to the effect that educational processes are, nevertheless, at this moment remarkably indefinite in purpose and ineffectual in result. If there be reason for this—and I fear that few of us can feel complacently certain of the contrary—it should seem sadly to follow that we who are engaged in the conduct of education nowadays leave something to be de-

sired in point of professional efficiency. Take, for example, the condition in which we find the study of languages, ancient and modern—Greek or Latin, French or German or English. A student who can currently read a foreign language, after a good many years of nominal devotion to it at school and at college, is as remarkable as a black swan or a white crow; a student who emerges from a course of earnest instruction in English composition with perceptibly, or at least with incontestably, firmer command of his pen for general purposes than he had to begin with, has hardly yet had the benevolence to cross my path. Something analogous is true of work in literature, in history, in philosophy; it seems more or less true wherever my observation has extended. The most comforting comment on it takes the form of assurance that, inas-

much as ideals would no longer be ideals if they were attainable, an idealist so fatuous as to look for anything like ideal results is doomed to disappointment.

Refreshed by this, one is presently confronted with another fact, less debatable. It is from these very students that our own colleges, other colleges, schools everywhere, the country in general yearly select the teachers charged with the task of instructing younger human beings in subjects so far from mastered by themselves. If the consequent predicament were local, all we should need anywhere would be to ascertain where what we try to do is done better than we do it, and to correct our errors accordingly. So far as I am aware, however, search for such light has hardly led us beyond regions of darkness indistinguishable from our

own; this seems as extensive as the North American Continent, if not, indeed, as the modern world. One sadly recalls the story of the student who made pilgrimage to a celebrated institution of learning, for the purpose of sitting at somebody's feet, and complained that, alas, he could find no feet to sit at. Humble in spirit though we may be, it is not granted us to perceive others demonstrably much better than ourselves. So there we are. We all do our best; we all know that those who study under us may be trusted to do theirs, at least when charged with responsibility. The trouble is not moral. Yet we ourselves, on the whole, teach ill; and those whom we teach, ill-taught, teach in turn rather more ill still; and those whom they have taught surge up to us year by year, to be taught on, less and less ready to under-

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stand what little teaching we have begun to learn how to give them.

There is trouble here, at first baffling. As focusses of force, we all begin to seem despairingly out of adjustment. Unless our line of reasoning has been all wrong, however, we may presently conclude that when any of us is out of adjustment it must be for one of three reasons: either intelligence, or cumulative power, or radiatory power is disproportionate—excessive or defective, as the case may be. The immediately consequent consideration to which I shall invite your attention may, perhaps, have its allurements; for it is evidently an intelligent though cursory scrutiny of a matter dear to us all—namely, the condition of our own intelligence, so far as we are teachers or scholars.

One thing seems instantly clear. At this moment our intelligence is

alive and wide-awake. Yet a very little retrospect will probably convince us that it has waked up pretty lately. In old times, as the times of our youth have acceleratingly become, the purpose of teaching was chiefly disciplinary, and the method authoritative. I remember, for example, the anecdote of a schoolmaster in an old New England seaport, who was trying to teach a stubborn boy the elements of navigation. He made some statement about logarithms, and the boy inquired how he knew it was so. The teacher pulled a knife out of his pocket: "What's that?" he asked.—"A pen-knife," said the boy.—"How do you know?" asked the teacher.—"I don't know how I know," answered the boy, "but I know I know."—"Very well," said the teacher, "that is the way I know logarithms"; and thereupon he proceeded with the

lesson—this part of which the boy never forgot. The principles and methods thus exemplified had one great merit: they remarkably developed and strengthened in pupils the power of concentrating attention, by sheer force of will, on uninteresting matters. Apart from this, they had no obvious effect on what intelligence the pupils may have possessed. We have bravely changed all that. One reason why our intelligence is so wide-awake nowadays may perhaps be found in the fact that the intelligence of our predecessors was almost asleep. So long as force is force and life is life, the story of both will be one of action and reaction.

Now our scientific friends, I believe, tell us that reaction and action are ultimately equal. Those of us who are not initiated into the mysteries of science are accordingly driven toward

the conclusion that if the one gets us nowhere, the other will get us nowhere else. Matters might be worse. The old teaching had its merits, after all; though it was not very intelligent, and though its focal selection of force was extremely limited, it managed to radiate with considerable exactitude and with some approach to intensity. It did not know what it was about; but it came fairly near accomplishing its blind and traditional purpose. The chief trouble lay in the fact that blind tradition can hardly lead to such variation as is nowadays adored under the name of progress. When intelligence began to wake up, the air seemed thrilling with promise. We would ask ourselves what we were about; we would get rid of outworn obstacles; we would direct all our energies straight to the point, as soon as the point was

found; and such beings as should result from these millennial new adjustments would evince the infinite perfectibility of human nature. So we went to work, and so we are at work still. We know what we are about far more nearly than people knew a century ago. We have got rid of many obstacles without always making sure that they were needless; we have attempted, for example, to cure the reluctance of pupils by allowing them—from kindergarten to elective courses at college—the luxury of the slightest possible strain on unwilling attention. Yet we have not incontestably improved the pupils, nor yet so certainly ascertained just where to direct our energies as to direct them anywhere with quite the intensity of our rule-of-thumb predecessors. Earth, in fact, is no nearer heaven than it used to be. At times,

indeed, some of us, still resolved to get there or to know the reason why, grow sensible of doubt whether the time is not at hand when we may best sit down, with good cigars, and think out the reason why.

Thus ruminating, we should probably come to the conclusion that one reason why is that we have been trying too hard to understand what we are about. We all know the sermons which have been preached from the text of Hamlet. We all know, as well, that academies have never yet produced great works of art; and some of our friends assure us that what we cherish as our intelligence shrinks to nothing beside that of certain Oriental sages devoted to life-long contemplation of their own navels. One might go on, world without end. The sum and substance of it all would be that

some inkling of why the teachers of to-day are inefficient, or, in other words, ill-adjusted to their environment, may perhaps be found in a reactionary awakening of intelligence to a degree where it begins to be inhibitory.

Now our previous considerations should assure us at this point of something comfortably near a fact. So far as intelligence can be inhibitory in its effect on man, as a focus of force—and therefore so far as it can interfere with him as an agent or a subject of education—it must do so by interfering either with his focal power of gathering force or with his equally focal power of radiating it.

Our question thus becomes more definite; and the moment we inquire, in the first place, if, how, and when intelligence has come to meddle with the cumulative powers of our little human lenses, we can begin to discern an

obvious answer. In the good old times, we have agreed, intelligence was torpid. Awakened, and directed toward the state of education at the period of its awakening, its honest conviction, quite warranted by the momentary facts, was that education had become stupidly conventional. People learned things by heart, all the way from the alphabet to geometry and the Odes of Horace; what they had thus learned they repeated to others who tried to learn from them; they were getting to resemble Mohammedan scholars, required to commit to memory the Koran and all the orthodox glosses on the sacred text, and supposed to need no more knowledge this side of Paradise. The consequent counsel of intelligence was that you should try to understand what you know before you proceed to do anything else with it.

This reaction we may agree to have been healthy, like the awakening of intelligence which stimulated it. Very clearly, there was chance for improvement. We must set ourselves to work selectively. We must not rest content with accepting and imparting knowledge; we must scrutinise it, and acquire it. We must test what comes to us, proving all things, and holding fast only to that which is good. Torpidity had lulled our cumulative powers till they were starving for want of use. Here was the place where healthy reaction would surely bring about a new adjustment, better for the whole universe.

That the reaction has done a great deal of good I should be the last to deny. We can hardly imagine nowadays what vast fields of inquiry, familiar and remote, still lay fallow a

generation or two ago. A generation or two ago hardly any one could have imagined how few to-day would remain unbroken by plough or even harrow. The harvests garnered in libraries all over the world are rich beyond the dreams of scholars whom you and I can remember; and these treasures, in their crude form generally to be described as theses, are true treasures, in that they imply something more than hard and conscientious work; they could never have been wrested from their hidden lairs without the inspiration of devoted enthusiasm. It has all been worth while. So we press on still, competitively eager to gather and to garner more and more. But some of us, the Lord knows why, are beginning to wonder whether, on the whole, we have not gone rather too far. No one could pretend that intelli-

gence has here proved inhibitory to education by any process of repression. If it be true, however, that intelligence is inhibitory at all, here is a point where the trouble may perhaps partly lie, by reason of an over-development as fatal to balance as atrophy itself.

We have strayed long enough in the misty regions of metaphor. It is time to consider just what we mean. Nothing can remind us more distinctly than the subjects of theses to which candidates for the degree of doctor of philosophy, or the like, have consecrated months and years of earnest work. Here are two or three. I remember at Harvard, not many years ago, one in Latin, certified as creditable by such of my colleagues as can currently read that learned language, on the methods of hair-dressing practised in imperial Rome. I have been informed, by the

way, if I remember rightly, that the scholar who wrote it was not exceptional for personal tidiness. I remember another entitled "*De ea quae dicitur attractione in enuntiationibus relativis apud scriptores Græcos*"—which means, I believe, "*Concerning what is called attraction in relative constructions used by Greek authors.*" A third concerned the tenure of land in the dominions of Brandenburg under the sovereignty of the Great Elector; the writer of this is said by one of his examiners to have displayed boundless ignorance of shipping laws and tariffs in English-speaking regions; but he was so unique an authority on Brandenburg real estate that he was declared proficient in economic history.

Any one familiar with modern American universities must have plenty of similar memories. Pretty lately, for

example, my attention as a student of literature in America has been called to a printed thesis which professed to make some contribution to the literary history of Colonial Pennsylvania, and to another about the "Heralds of American Literature." The latter dealt with works written in America between the Revolution and the year 1800. This stagnant period had already been exhaustively treated by the late Professor Tyler; he had omitted, however, to emphasize the important truth that certain letters of Joel Barlow, or some such forgotten worthy, are preserved in the Public Library of Southport, Connecticut.

To turn to foreign fields, there is no degree anywhere more worthily sustained than that of Doctor of Letters, at the University of Paris. Among the theses presented there by candidates in

Modern Literature a generation ago was the admirable work of the late Professor Beljame on "The Public and Men of Letters in England during the Eighteenth Century." Whoever has had the pleasure of reading it must have recognised its permanent value in defining how English literature passed from the stage of dependence on patronage to that of self-support, derived from willing readers who stood ready to purchase. The book throws new floods of light into the toiling garrets of Grub Street. The very fact, however, that a brilliant French student should have turned his attention to so limited a field of English literature implies that the field of French literature was approaching exhaustion. The subjects of some later theses produced in France imply the same fact there concerning the literary history of England.

Here are a few of them: "The Youth of Wordsworth," "Robert Burns," "George Crabbe," "John Thelwall," "Edgar Allan Poe," "Nathaniel Hawthorne," "Ralph Waldo Emerson," "Oliver Wendell Holmes," and "William James." I have reason to believe, indeed, that a serious French candidate has lately considered a project of presenting for the Doctorate of Letters at the Sorbonne a punctilious study of the work of Mr. William Dean Howells.

By this time the conclusion toward which our course of specification has tended must loom clear. The healthy reactionary impulse of intelligence toward investigation has got to a point where a rapidly increasing amount of investigating energy must be devoted to inquiring what there is left to investigate. One can imagine, indeed, an approaching future when the mere dis-

covery of some uninvestigated corner of any field of study imaginable shall be hailed with tumultuous learned ovation all over the world as abundant and overflowing evidence of such power as should command the highest possible degree, from the most rigorous of academic tribunals. When this rapturous vision begins to fade into the light of common day, any of us who may have yielded ourselves to its allurements must awaken to its chief meaning for us here and now. If we momentarily agree to consider your teacher or your scholar as if he were a man, and therefore an intelligent focus of force, and if we admit that he is at present inefficient for want of adjustment to his environment, we can hardly avoid perceiving that one reason why may be found in an inhibitory excess of intelligence which has resulted in over-stim-

ulated exhaustion of his focal power of accumulation.

To put the case more simply, we are all at our best—men or teachers or scholars—when we know, with the least hesitation, what we possess, and what we want, and what to do with both. If we devote ourselves too strenuously to hunting for what we want, we run the risk of forgetting what we have, of not knowing why we want what we want, and of losing all conception of what on earth we shall do with anything, whether already in our possession or by and by to be got there from somewhere else. That string of words has a thread of meaning, to hold it together; and nothing short of what sounds preposterous could have brought us without shock to a recent incident in my professional life. Preposterous or not, it will serve our next and almost

our last purpose; this is evidently to consider what sort of radiance we teachers nowadays diffuse among the students at our feet.

In one of my classes there was a youth of deserving aspect, who did me the honour to follow my lectures attentively. So I felt duly grateful; and when he asked whether he might consult me about his plans in life, I was more than glad to put my wisdom at his service. Within a few weeks, it presently transpired, he had come for the first time into possession of an encyclopædia. The joys of ownership had impelled him to plunge deep into the volumes. He had thereupon perceived, with genial precision, one thing which was the matter with learning, as previously imparted to him. It had been presented only in fragments; as he put the case, every-

thing had been awfully specialised. That his encyclopædia was composed by specialists he cheerfully conceded; that its contents were even more fragmentary than his college courses he was equally ready to admit. He urged, however, that there was a good deal more in the encyclopædia than the best specialist of them all could ever pretend to know. This granted, he went on, with divinely synthetic impulse, to opine that, if you could put this material completely together, you would know everything. Within the present limits of human knowledge, I agreed, some such statement of ideal omniscience might be accepted. Then came his memorably explosive burst of imagination. Like all good men, he was humble in spirit, yet desirous of doing good. The good he most wished to do was to preserve others from the

intoxicating enticements of specialisation. Could he do this better, he asked, than by consecrating his life to the task of instruction at some fresh-water college, where, with the sole aid of his encyclopædia, he might hope in due time to become the titular "Professor of Everything"?

Comment on this incident seems needless. I have tried to recount it literally, nothing extenuating nor aught setting down in malice. It left me certainly a sadder man, and perhaps a wiser. That boy, no doubt, talked like a fool; but, when he went away, there seemed to me something else than folly in the memory of him. He had dimly perceived, and in his own stammering way he had fearlessly tried to express, a truth pregnant for you and me. For if you and I, as teachers or scholars, as priests or initiates of the mystery of

education, threatened on all sides by unmeaningly impious dissipation of our mystery, and bewildered by the accelerating rush of environment all about us, are to give due account of ourselves to the future, we must bestir ourselves to be dynamic.

To be dynamic as teachers, and thus, so far as we can, to make dynamic in turn those who come within our influence, is the earthly duty of our profession. Again, you may well feel, I am losing myself in fine, big words. Even so, there is comfort for us all looming in sight. These vagaries have already strayed so long that they cannot stray much longer. They may leave us nowhere, to be sure; if they do, they will have done at worst only what education now does to most of its patients; and few of us yet are ready to declare in consequence that education is not

worth while. Indeed, I remember few more inspiring eulogies than that which a professor of my acquaintance once privately pronounced on a newly departed colleague. The career just gently closed, he declared, had been among the most memorably useful in the whole history of the field of learning which it had striven to cultivate. By faithful adherence to wrong methods, in pursuit of wrong ends, it had conclusively demonstrated what ought not to be done. Next to triumphant success, my friend declared, this is, perhaps, the highest achievement within the range of human endeavour. All the same, most of us are ambitious enough to cling to the last infirmity of noble minds, and not to rest content with the prospect of a usefulness based on the fact that we shall unintentionally have been useless. So

far as we desire to know what we shall do to be saved, accordingly, we must still inquire, though never so hastily, what we mean by *dynamic*, as we have just used that impressive word.

Intelligent, living lenses, we have agreed to imagine ourselves, focally collecting and radiating certain streams of the constantly accelerating force which surges about us, no one knows whence or whither; and our function, so far as we are teachers, and priests or initiates of the mystery of education, is to mould other lenses at once so firmly and so flexibly that they shall do their own work better. So, on and on, to furthest time. All this work, whether ours or theirs, is done best when intelligence best selects, best combines, and best radiates—itself nobly submissive to the quiveringly balanced conditions of its task. Thus we have generalised.

All that we can now do more is to attempt, if only for an instant, to translate our generalisation into something like specific terms.

In choosing those nearest my own experience, I do only what I should eagerly expect any one else to do under similar circumstances. For a good many years I have been mostly a teacher of literature, whose business has been, so far as in me lay, to understand it, and to impart understanding of it to others. Among those others, year by year, there have always been a few who desired to become teachers of literature themselves; as a rule, these men have decided to prepare themselves for their life work by winning the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Over and over again we have accordingly found ourselves deep in discussion of how such students should concern

themselves with literature. If we had all agreed about anything, we should not have been human. Unless I am wholly mistaken, the while, hardly any of us would deny that literature is among the enduring expressions of history; that among other expressions of history, equally significant and memorable, are the other fine arts and philosophy; and, to go no further, that the vehicle of literature is language.

Here, instantly, are other rays or streams of the force surging about us, not to be disdained or neglected by those whose chief duty is concerned with the vibrant rays of literature alone. There was never work of literature, from the Homeric poems to the yellow journalism of these United States of America, not the better to be understood for understanding of the words put together in its making, of

the historical and social conditions collected at the moment of its utterance, or of what men were painting and building and moulding and singing and dreaming in the world about it. No doubt, all this is already far too much for any man of letters to gather firmly in any conscious focus. None the less, if he forget the existence of a single ray of it, he forgets at his peril. The most frequent phase of such disaster used to be the pedantry of the grammarians; at present it is pressed hard by the gossipy minuteness of the antiquarians. Our higher duty is not to neglect, but to select, and to reject—that is, so far as our focal business is cumulative. Then, within our inmost selves, must come the flash which can synthesise into new combination the rays of force, from near and far, most needful for our radiant purpose.

Finally must come expression—in no wise an end in itself, nor an idol to be worshipped for intrinsic monstrosity or grace, but an inevitable condition of imparting our synthesis to other minds than our own. We are at our best when we select best, when we best fuse anew the vagrant rays which we have selected, and when our expression flows forth with the clear white heat of fresh and living fusion.

So, at least, it has come to seem to me, after thirty years of plodding work, none too fruitful. There is left us only the question of how we should apply all this to the patients in our charge, suffering until we can turn them adrift with what hope of survival may inhere in the mystic letters Ph.D. The answer is short and, for a wonder, simple. Doctors of philosophy must earn their degrees chiefly by writing theses. So

far as these theses can stimulate at once intelligent power of selection, of fusion, and of expression, they are priceless means of education. So far as they either exaggerate or repress intelligence, or selective power, or power of fusion, or expression itself, they may begin to do more harm than good; and harm, like good, and everything else, is infinite in its possibilities. Concerning the present condition of such theses I will not further inquire. What the future condition of them might conceivably be we will leave to the dreamers.

Whereof you will more than probably have found me one. Imperfectly focal, I fear, and dimly radiant this effort of mine to set forth opinion must seem. All I can urge in excuse for having made such demand on your attention is the tremendous truth that

this mystery of ours—the mystery of education—still retains the marvellous power of commanding enthusiastic national faith. To any of us who have come to feel this, and therewith the gravity of our responsibility, no earnest effort to confront it can seem a waste of time. So if any of you have found food for thought in my belief that our real task is the fashioning of living lenses which shall intelligently accumulate and radiate streams of the accelerating force in which we are all surging toward we know not what, our hour together is justified. For it will have done its own little part to encourage our mystery toward the high hope that in the years to come education may help make human forces not explosive but constructive.

III

THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

An Address before the Public School Teachers of Chicago, opening the Elizabeth Kirkland Memorial Lectureship, in January, 1908; repeated in substance before the Women's College in Brown University, 27 April, 1909.

III

THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The privilege of opening this course of lectures is great and grave.* Of all human careers that of a teacher sometimes seems the most desperately momentary; to any teacher, at least, the course of daily work must often appear no better than a changeless recurrence of monotonously repetitory routine. As year by year, too, pupils pass beyond the horizon of a teacher's vision, this

*The Elizabeth Kirkland Memorial Lectureship was founded by the pupils of the late Miss Kirkland to provide occasional lectures for the benefit of teachers in the Public Schools of Chicago.

routine must almost inevitably appear to be not only benumbing but fruitless. With each new class you find yourself just where you began with the last, till perforce you fall to wondering whether anybody can ever get anywhere, or be of any use whatsoever. By the mere fact of its existence, such a foundation as the Elizabeth Kirkland Memorial Lectureship must therefore be a constant source of incalculable encouragement. It implies that the faithful life of one earnest teacher has borne the fruit of living and loving memory; that the influence of it is passing beyond the limitations of any momentary human conditions; that it has kindled aspiration toward ends vaster, higher, more stimulatingly remote from the deadening realities of daily labour than any ends, or pensions, which such labour can visibly attain. So those of us who come, from

time to time, charged with the happy duty of keeping this aspiration freshly alive, of bearing some message from a beloved teacher of the past to faithful teachers of the present and of the future, are truly missionaries.

The mission with which we are charged, the while, is in its very essence immaterial—a matter not of the body but of the spirit. There was no need of a caution kindly given me with the summons which has brought me hither —that this is not the moment, if indeed there ever could be a fit moment, for dwelling on such matters as the fashion of our pedagogic brethren now calls equipment or methods. For my own part, I am rather disposed to think all such discussion abortive. A good workman needs few tools; a good teacher can teach anyhow and anywhere; no equipment or methods can

ever take the place, or much alter the place, of the one quality which any good teacher must essentially possess. The quality, to be sure, is so hard to name that I shall not vex you with efforts to decide what to call it. The effect of it any one can see, wherever it shines, in the instinctive and persistent attitude of pupils. Pupils will always recognise a good teacher as their superior—their superior surely in all matters related to work with which they are engaged together, and their superior as well, if the superiority is to have enduring influence, in the more subtle yet equally certain matters of mind and of character. For your good teacher, of whatever grade, must be a leader, and a leader so securely confident that pupils shall follow not reluctantly or by force of discipline, but eagerly.

Your good teacher, too, must be a leader of pupils who, if they continue their work of study to the point where it approaches maturity, will by and by, in the full glory of university standing, come to be called by the name of students. Dulled though that word may be by the unenlivened commonplace of its daily use, the evident meaning of it leads us straight toward the vital spirit of such life-work as is ours, teachers together. It is our business to make our pupils—avowed students when they get to college, and virtually students from the childish moment when they first come within our influence—strengthen in themselves the qualities which shall make their work of study not dead but alive, not mechanical but intelligent, not benumbing but effective. To accomplish this, I believe—so far as accomplishment may

lie within our powers—there is only one way. We ourselves must never cease to be students, too. We must grow increasingly older than our pupils, of course, and if so may be, increasingly wiser; but neither age nor wisdom should ever check—rather, both age and wisdom should forever impel—our aspiration, as the days pass, and the months, and the years, to know more and more. We should not only long unceasingly to learn more of the precise matters with which our daily work is concerned; more resolutely still, and in far greater degree, we should constantly strive to possess ourselves of the truths and the mysteries which lie highly beyond the initiatory drudgeries of our brief, unsatisfactory class rooms.

If these words seem too big to mean much, we can soon translate them into

simpler terms. Just so far as our teaching makes pupils eager to know more than we have time or power to teach them, it is a constructive force in their lives. Just so far as this work leaves us ourselves humbly yet courageously aware of how much more we need to master before we can begin to do it a bit as it ought to be done, it is a constructive force in ours. True study keeps us always students, one and all, untiring in our search for knowledge and for the fruit thereof. Knowledge alone may, perhaps, be much—an admirable and wonderful treasury of facts, of methods, of excellent and far from useless detail; but knowledge alone can never be an inspiring ideal. To grow into a living force, it must merge itself in the more personal, more human ideal of wisdom. Gossip, as some learned authority has told us, is not

history; so long as you know facts only apart, even though you know the whole encyclopædia by heart, you know nothing but gossip; begin to think even two separate facts together, and you have begun your understanding of history. Our true task is not of accumulation but of synthesis, of philosophy. We must know our facts, beyond doubt; but we must not thereupon rest content. We must never cease our willing effort to perceive them in constantly new lights, as we come to see them, more and more, not separately but in their mutual relations.

Now so far as these general considerations have truth or sense in them, they are clearly true of study or of teaching throughout the whole range of either. They might be illustrated, by considering the normal, or, if you prefer, the ideal course of development

in any range of learning whatsoever. Each of us may accordingly turn confidently for illustration to the matters with which he is familiar. This is why, professionally occupied with literature, I shall not scruple to confine your attention to that field. What we may perceive there is virtually the same that we might perceive anywhere else, if we gave ourselves over to the guidance of some one elsewhere expert. The test of living study is that it shall stimulate curiosity, aspiration, and willing, almost spontaneous effort. So the study of literature is living, with pupils and with teachers alike, when it keeps them, each in his degree, not content to lay aside books when a task is done, but eager, from the very impetus of the task, to know literature, far and wide, and if so may be, to make it.

Among American teachers of the present day, however, I fear we must all agree, the study of literature generally begins in a far from alluring form. Unless my experience and observation are blindly limited, such of us as are called on to devote our lives to this subject, which ought to be inspiring, find our humane enthusiasm terribly chilled by insistent demands for work so remote from our ideals that it may well seem apart from them altogether. Eager though we may be to impart the secret of the spirit of letters, we are required, during our early professional years and sometimes during our whole teaching lives, to attempt instruction in English composition, and thus to add our own shortcomings to the innumerable and various shortcomings throughout the past of those who have heroically attempted to impart to unwilling Ameri-

can youth the secret of expressing itself in its native language.

To any conscientious teacher, however hopeful or despairing of approach to success, this work must often grow to seem inhibitory of all else, stultifying, in certain moods a devoted suicide of mind and spirit. Nothing can prevent it, honestly done, from resolving itself into infinite recurrence of petty detail, inevitable and almost mechanical. I have known a professor, in one of our older colleges, who had to correct hundreds of themes a month, who was said to do so with punctilious accuracy, and who has been heard to assert that the one circumstance which enabled him to preserve his reason through this arduously obscure career was that he could read themes punctiliously for hours without any consciousness of what either he or they were

about. By some dispensation of divine grace he could put to sleep all but the theme-reading faculty which had nearly become to him, at least professionally, the only visible end and aim of tediously despairing earthly life.

No distortion of human nature could be much more abortive than that into which this good man thus came near falling. Detail, to be sure, is never negligible. We neglect it at our peril, not only in such grave matters as our educational work, but in table manners, or in clothes. There is a certain positive importance in forks and in tooth-brushes. When details, however, come to seem the chief facts of human existence,—when you find yourself, for example, disposed to believe that the manner in which fellow-beings hold their knives or punctuate their paragraphs is primarily vital to the

welfare of the universe,—you may feel sadly sure that you are well on your way to accept a scheme of life untrue for want of immensity. That way lies atrophy. We can see the gauntness thereof in pupils, or in ourselves, when either of us begins to imagine that the chief end of our effort to compose is the obedient observance of accepted rules.

Something else than gauntness, on the other hand, will gleam inspiritingly before us all, teachers and pupils alike, in those rarer moments when for a little while we can perceive the real place of detail or of rule in the whole structure of vigorous learning. To most of us such moments come only at sadly remote intervals; clear vision can persist only with a very few. The most bewildered of us, however, can sometimes feel that, in their proper

places, rules and details are priceless; that their places are those wherein they can aid us toward the one ideal end of all study of composition; and that this ideal end is expression as nearly adequate as our earthly powers can make it. There is no deeper folly than that which would maintain literary art to stop short when it reaches the lower limits of poetry, or of imaginative creation. In its own lesser way a letter, an examination book, a college thesis—or whatever else your poetaster would most disdain—may surely be a work of art, and as a work of art a thing of beauty. Whenever we can assert it exquisitely adapted to its purpose, slight and fleeting though that purpose be, we may honestly delight in it as a fragment of literature.

If teachers or students of English composition can make themselves thus

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view the work before them, that work takes on a new and a brighter aspect. Even their benumbingly recurrent experience of technical detail, unconsecrated by the reverend traditions which make the minutiæ of the classical grammars a mysterious initiation into the communion of ancestral learning, can come to be an incentive toward the making of literature—of "the lasting expression in words of the meaning of life." Unless we can feel the end of composition to be the making of literature, I believe, any student thereof, teacher or pupil, must find the task before him despairing, withering, mortal. The moment any of us can steadfastly perceive the true height of our purpose, however, a new vista opens. There are limitless fields for us to explore—limitless regions for alert study, vagrant or systematic, as the case may be. Who-

ever is even remotely concerned with the making of literature is confronted with a task which should put his highest powers to the test. For thus, whatever our accomplishment, we begin to measure ourselves with those who have approached success in the fine art wherein we find ourselves bravely experimental. So far as we, here and now, are ever to make literature at all, we can soon see, we shall contribute our own part, great or small, to the already extensive literature of America.

Very likely, for some little time past, these observations of mine may have seemed aimlessly vagrant. Pretending to invite you to listen to some considerations concerning the study of literature, I have first indulged myself in rather elusive generalisations, and have then discussed, in none too enthusiastic temper, a matter so remote from literature

in our daily lives as the teaching of boys and girls how to write the English language. If I be not all in error, the while, I have led you along a road more regular than it may have seemed. Regular, I mean, because, at least so far as I have been able to observe, most of us who have been engaged anywhere in the teaching of composition, have found ourselves, often with little special preparation for the task, called upon to teach as well—or as ill, if you prefer, —something about the literature of our native country. The two things somehow hang together.

In itself this new call is stimulating. It opens for us new fields of exploration, far more invigorating than those where we have begun to labour. The very extent of their range, though, is bewildering, and bewildering most of all to faithful spirits who have come, from

sad experience, to believe or to assume that honest work, exploratory or cultivating, must always be a matter of conscientious detail. We have generalised so much that I shall ask no indulgence for illustrating what I mean by a specific instance. Not very long ago I received from a polite stranger somewhere in the West a letter of which the gently diffident temper was implied by a postage stamp, duly enclosed, to expedite my reply. The writer, it appeared, was a student, occupied, while pursuing some study of what he called American Literature, with the preparation of a paper about James Russell Lowell.

Now, as a matter of familiar and acknowledged fact, Lowell was a member of the class of 1838 at Harvard College, where he was duly elected, or appointed, class poet. He accordingly

wrote a class poem, in no wise memorable, which was subsequently printed in a small pamphlet, dear to collectors by reason of his subsequent and deserved eminence. It is also true that he got into some sort of trouble with the college authorities. There is a legend, I know not how authoritative, that a grave and reverend personage, conducting college prayers, closed his eyes as he lifted face and voice in petition to our Creator; that, upon some eloquent reference in his prayer to his aspirations for the undergraduates collected at his feet, one of them politely bowed, as an acknowledgment of this intercessory courtesy; that other students godlessly tittered; and that the devout divine, thereupon opening one or both of his eyes, discerned the urbanely saluting figure of young Lowell, who was presently rusticated in consequence.

The story may be quite apocryphal. Something or other, however,—and something not in the least disgraceful,—certainly clouded the serenity of Lowell's undergraduate relations with the college authorities. This fact is touched on, I believe, in various biographical notices of this distinguished man of letters, some of which state that it prevented him from delivering his class poem; others of which intimate that the poem was duly read in public, despite his discipline. This divergence of opinion happened to excite the interest of my Western correspondent; he wrote to inquire whether Lowell's class poem, accessible in print, was duly delivered or not, in 1838. My answer, I fear, displeased him; for, perhaps because of my neglect to enclose a stamp, he never did me the kindness to acknowledge it. In substance, it was that

I had no idea whether the poem was actually given before a duly assembled audience or not; that the general circumstances of Lowell's boyish temper, the only thing which could make the question interesting, were admitted by everybody; and that any student who should waste his time on so immaterial a question of detail ran the risk of never knowing why Lowell, or any other American man of letters, should be any more worth writing about than if they had never written a paragraph.

Quite possibly, some of you may think this line of comment heartlessly unsympathetic. I did not mean it so. To my mind, it was the best lesson which, as an honest teacher of literature in America, I could give off-hand to an earnest student of this not too comprehensive phase of human expression. One might fairly assume that

his true purpose was to possess himself of the body, and if so might be of the spirit as well, of those American publications which together have proved themselves lasting enough to be regarded as enduring literature. Any question of gossipy personal detail, just like any considerable study of ephemeral or trivial or obsolete writings produced at any time by our fellow-countrymen, would thus be a dangerous distraction. The details of Lowell's college scrape had no more to do with what makes Lowell memorable than had the breed of the hens whose eggs he habitually ate for breakfast at the age of ten. Whoever supposed that they had, was as far from intelligent study of the real literature of our country as if he were wasting precious time on the Puritan sermons of the Seventeenth Century, or on the scribblings of good

men who tried to make literature between the Revolution and the year 1800. The best advice I knew how to give any earnest student of our literary history was to back out of these thickets, and once in the open to ask himself, without any distraction of detail, what the literature of America really is.

To this question, the answer is at once so clear and so evident that you will find half the students who ought to know it—teachers and pupils alike—groping in the dark. Beyond peradventure, the memorable literature of America—and therefore the only literature of America as yet worth general study—is that part of English literature which was produced in the United States during the first three-quarters of the Nineteenth Century. What came before is clearly of no more than historical interest; what has ensued is still

too near us for ultimate critical classification.

A part of English literature I have called the literature of our country, for the obvious reason that it is written in the English language; and thus, in its own way, is as integral a part of English literature as the Idyls of Theocritus are a part of Greek. When we consider any literature so broadly as we are considering our subject now,—or as I believe that any wise teacher may best make ignorant but curious pupils consider it, to begin with,—we can wisely touch only on the writers who have emerged and have endured as important. When we thus consider the literature of America, we shall accordingly find not only that its present limits are no more extensive than I have just stated, but that within those limits there are as yet only ten

indisputably memorable names. These names, already familiar everywhere, bid fair to stay so. They are the names of Irving and Cooper, of Bryant and Poe; and of Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, Whittier, and Hawthorne.

Some, I know, would clamorously add to the list that of Walt Whitman. Add it, if you like; to my mind he is too eccentric, and too far from anything like popular appeal to his compatriots, for any such certainty of distinction. If urgently bidden to increase the company, I should be far more disposed to add the more gracious and beautiful name of Sidney Lanier. This very budding dispute will go far, I think, to prove the accuracy of the list I have ventured to set down as unquestionably deserving our attention. Other writers than these ten are not

to be neglected or altogether forgotten; no more are other periods than those in which these ten lived and moved and had their being and did their work. In such broadly general considerations as ours, however, other periods in our literary history and other American writers may best be regarded, almost like the boyish pranks of Lowell, as matters of detail. They are to be thought of, if at all, and in that case to be thought with, not as primarily important, but only so far as they can help us to define our impressions of the few works and authors acknowledged to be our most characteristic and our best. Their function, in such study as we are now concerned with, is to help us understand the nature of the approach to excellence made by the Americans whose writings are most nearly excellent. These by themselves are enough and to

spare for all but exceptionally well-informed students. Repeat the ten names again if you will. You can hardly help feeling a glow of patriotic complacency, as they remind you of what pure-hearted work our country has added, during the century lately past, to the literature of the English language.

If I have seemed to repeat that reference to the literature of the English language unduly, the point at which we have now arrived may, perhaps, win me justification. Any vital study, I hope we are agreed, must lead us beyond its own limits. Thus, a little while ago, we discovered that vital study of English Composition in America would lead us almost insensibly to study of our national literature. Now, very little later, we discover that the study of literature in America will similarly lead us, half unawares, to the

consideration, and probably to the study as well, of the whole range of English literature throughout the Nineteenth Century.

A moment ago, we indulged ourselves in the pleasure of patriotic complacency, as we surveyed the work of the ten American men of letters who have emerged superior to their contemporaries. Complacency does one good only if it stop short of fatuousness. This reference to the literature of England may thus prove tonic. Our eminent literary worthies were not only contemporaries of our somewhat less distinguished compatriots whom we have not troubled ourselves to recall by name. They were men, too, of the century which added to English literature the works of Wordsworth, of Coleridge, of Shelley, of Keats, of Byron, and of Scott; of Tennyson and of

Browning; of Dickens, of Thackeray, and of George Eliot; and, to go no further, of Macaulay, of Carlyle, and of Ruskin. The list might extend far longer; as it stands, it is enough for our purposes, corrective and scholarly alike. By the side of their English rivals the glories of our American constellation do not shine so supremely bright as we let ourselves fancy when we contemplated them alone. They are not quenched, nor even quite dimmed; only their magnitude no longer seems so positively imposing as we had fancied. To put the case at its mildest, the English literature of the Nineteenth Century is quite as significant as the literature of America, in which we were tempted to take perhaps overweening pride.

What is more, we must presently admit, the English literature of the Nineteenth Century by no means com-

prises all the literature of what we still regard as our Mother Country. Taken by itself, to be sure, it seems quite as important as the whole literature of America, from the beginning to this day. Yet before the eldest of the Englishmen whom we have named wrote a line, English literature possessed names in plenty at least as memorable as his. A very few of them, taken almost at random, should serve our purpose now. When Wordsworth was born, English literature already possessed the work of Johnson, for example, of Pope, of Addison, of Dryden, of Milton, of Bacon, of Shakspere, of Spenser, and of Chaucer.

The very mention of these names will already have reminded you of a hundred others whom we cannot pause to recognize, one by one. It will have reminded you, too, of other matters than

individual authors which must be duly considered by any vital study of English literature: the Periodical Essay, for one thing; the Elizabethan Drama, for another; and for a third, the romantic poetry of the glowing Middle Ages. At due times and seasons, these and their like may well occupy studious years or careers. What concerns us at this moment, however, is rather the general question which begins to define itself stimulatingly and surely above and beyond other questions and lesser. Where, we must surely find ourselves wondering, does this English literature belong, whereof our own literature of America is only one little part? What is its final place, superb though it be by itself, in the whole scheme of literature toward perception of which the course of our study is beginning to lead us?

Thus considering English literature, we can presently discern it as one, and as only one, of at least five still vigorous literatures which now constitute the fundamental literature of Europe. We need hardly stop to name them—the literatures of France, of Italy, of Spain, of Germany, and this of our old ancestral England. Nebulous in their beginnings, they have all come into their full existence during the past six hundred years. What is more, in the course of their separately contemporaneous development they have incessantly and intricately interacted from their beginnings even unto this day. A long way we may now seem from the Puritan pulpits of New England, from American poetasters of the Eighteenth Century, from Lowell's class poem, delivered or not as the case may be in that fading summer of 1838, or from problems as

to when you should use *shall* and when *will*. Yet the road we have travelled has been straight from that dreary hollow of our daily school-rooms to this height where we are seeking to discern, in full open air, no longer what American literature is—if, indeed, America can as yet be said to possess anything quite worthy of so portentous a name—nor yet what English literature is, in its whole broad compass, but rather what that greater fact is, which comprises them both and so much more, too,—the lasting literature of Europe.

Beyond attempting an answer to this question I shall not pretend to guide your thoughts, or further to trouble you, to-day. Slight, elementary, obvious though the answer be, it should serve, I think, the chief purpose of our present conference. This is to assure ourselves that just as when the snares

of detail entangle the course of the spirit the study of literature is inhumanly benumbing, so when we can shake ourselves free from them this same study reveals itself as quiveringly human, inexhaustibly stimulating. It is my hope that I may indicate to you, though never so slightly, where you and I, who give our lives to teaching in modern America, have our own little place in the great whole of the literature of Europe. If so, we shall not have wasted the time we shall have passed together.

Broadly speaking, any one can see, the literature of Europe is divided into two distinct parts, or perhaps three, which together express the meaning of life as life has revealed itself to the European mind during the past twenty-five hundred years. The two completely distinct parts are commonly called ancient and modern; between them is a

long interval, not so clearly defined in literature as that which preceded or as that which has ensued ; its transitional obscurity, fascinatingly indistinct, combines with its position in historic time to give it the conventional name of mediæval. Antiquity, as expressed in literature, was purely European. The Middle Ages was a period when the other than European tradition of the Christian religion fused with the previously unmixed traditions of antique Europe. Modernity remains a period when people sprung from generations of these fused traditions have attempted, in various ways and with various degrees of success, to revive something like the antique purity of European completeness. To know our own place, as teachers of literature—or, at our highest, as makers of it, or at least as stimulators of others to make it—we must

be aware of all these periods which have gone before us. If so may be, we must grow aware of them humanly enough to make us long to know each and all better and better. So when, for these few coming moments, we here glance at them, in turn, we must not forget that we do so only to remind ourselves of what vast fields they offer for our straying, even though we never stray anywhere near their extreme limits.

When we thus consider the literature of antiquity, we can instantly see that, in turn, it divides itself clearly into two, and only two, distinct parts: the primal literature of Greece and the imperial literature of Rome. There is no need to remind ourselves that each of these by itself has proved more than enough to occupy the whole scholarly energy of centuries of lifetimes. To master either has long since been a feat beyond the

power of any but special, laborious, devoted students. In this, however, I see no reason for despairing revulsion into a mood where any of us should feel hopeless of acquaintance with either. It is with each of them as we found the case to be, a little while ago, with our own beginnings of literature in America, or with the strong, perennially vigorous literature of England. From the numberless writers who have combined to make any literature in the complex unity of its entirety, a few have emerged eminent; and from the work of these few any who will read them, even in the veiled disguise of enthusiastic translation, may come to know more of the spirit of the nations and the epochs which they express than is always vouchsafed to your plodding scholar, burrowing in detail until he cares mostly for technical exactitude.

The literature of Greece, for example, I have called primal. Any of you who know it at all, I think, will have some glimmering of the conception I have thus tried to summarise in a single and far from vivid word. It is that of the human mind, at last fully awakened in the form which we now recognise as European, face to face with concepts as wide and as varied as the range of mortal intellect can know; and troubled with no other perplexity than must always be involved in the acts of perception and of expression. The Greek, I mean, was free to see what he could, and to set it forth as best he might, untroubled by inhibitory consciousness of excellent standards to which he must in scholarly decency conform. With all its ultimate maturity of expression, with all its immense range of human perception, the literature of Greece has

in it something of the primal simplicity and dignity of childhood.

One might thus comment forever; it is better instantly to specify what I am trying to make clear. Read the first of European epics, in the poems of Homer; the first ripe European lyrics, in the verses attributed to Anacreon and to Sappho and in the Odes of Pindar; read dramatic poetry, sprung to life and almost supremely alive, in the tragedy of Æschylus, of Sophocles, and of Euripides, and in the comedy of Aristophanes; read history, unprecedented until it stands forth mature in the pages of Herodotus, of Thucydides, and of Xenophon; in Xenophon, again, and in Plato read of Socrates, and find philosophy made into literature; and marvel at the cosmic method of Aristotle, at the final eloquence of Demosthenes, and at exquisitely dainty

idyls of Theocritus. This whole task is not appalling. Any of us could read every line I have touched on in the course of a single summer vacation. Thereby any of us could come to know, and to know in such humanity as should make him eager to read on whenever he could, not the whole literature of Greece, but enough to assure him forever of its enduringly primal splendour.

Theocritus, the last Greek I have mentioned, flourished some three centuries before the Christian era. At that moment there was no other lasting literature in all Europe than theirs of Greece; and it was nearly two hundred years later when the literature of European antiquity began to be completed by the lasting literature of Rome. Imperial, I have called it, for the influence of it remains potent even to this remote day; and for one scholar,

through the centuries, who could read his Greek unaided there have been thousands who could make something out of the original pages of the Latin. Magnificent though Latin literature be, however, it is in certain aspects secondary. We need no deep learning to perceive that not a line of its enduring masterpieces was penned by any but men saturated with Greek culture, and reverencing Greek style as the matchless model of excellence. Primality can exist only once; nothing can revive it, any more than years can revive the clear-eyed purity of childhood.

You will feel what I mean when I hasten over the great literary names of Rome, even more summarily than I have hastened over those of Greece. Plautus and Terence begin the splendid story with their comedies full of Greek tradition; Lucretius could not

have made his wondrous didactic poem but for the wondrous thought of Epicurus; nor could Catullus have made his lyrics without the Greek lyrics to guide him. What is true of these writers is true, in other ways, of the rest who together make up the tremendous literature of the Romans—of Cicero, and even of Cæsar; of Virgil, of Horace, and of Ovid; of Livy and of Tacitus; of Juvenal and of Martial. Together, just as our Americans have reminded us of America, our Englishmen of England, and our Greeks of Greece, these thirteen undying names may remind us of what the literature of Rome was, and the temper of Rome, from the end of the Second Century before Christ to the beginning of the Second Century of the Christian Era—from the final days of the Republic to the reign of the twelfth of the Twelve Cæsars.

Imperial and decadent at once we must find that elder Europe, in the last days of its unmixed antiquity. To bring forth the times to come, it needed the advent of a spirit other than its own. That spirit was already at hand. It was under that same twelfth of the Twelve Cæsars, some authorities still assure us,—under that same Domitian,—that the last survivor of the Twelve Apostles wrote the last book of the New Testament. True or not, in the clear white light of the Higher Criticism, this current legend brings us straight to that other than European phase of antique humanity which was destined to surge traditionally forward, as the old European empire of Rome resolved itself into the separate nationalities of Christendom. The books in which these new traditions are recorded have become the most familiar in the European world,

even to the countless millions who have never opened these pages. In the Old Testament is preserved the whole literature of the Hebrews, barbarian to the Greeks, and older, I believe, than almost anything which the Greeks have left us. In the New Testament, this Hebrew tradition, amid the tremendous agony of imperial Rome, is focussed to the highest point of its religious efficacy. We have no time now to wander into the adjacent fields of history. We can hardly help seeing, the while, that they are close beside us—that to understand literature a bit as those who made it meant it we must never forget the circumstances of their earthly experience. So it is not too wide an excursion from the literature which is our true concern together to remind ourselves that during the centuries when Barbarians finally broke the unity

of the Empire, the Church persisted, until one might almost summarise the story by asserting that the Twelve Cæsars were supplanted by the Twelve Apostles.

Then came the thousand years and more which the careless usage of our time is still apt to summarise under the intangible name of the Middle Ages. Literature they have left us, various and in plenty—from the solemn works of the Fathers of the Church to the hauntingly imaginative beginnings of every strain of modern letters which has ensued. Yet what the Middle Ages have most surely transmitted to modern times is not so much enduring literature as enduring tradition—the stuff from which enduring literature is made. We can glance at only a few examples of this, but these few should suffice us now. It is to the Middle Ages that we

owe the traditions of the Church and of the Holy Roman Empire; of the knightly heroes, such as Charlemagne and Arthur; of the saints, from the Fathers themselves, and George with his Dragon, to Dominic and to Francis of Assisi. It is to the Middle Ages that we owe the ideals of chivalry, of honour, of courtesy, and of devotion to ideal womanhood. It is to them that we owe the whole range of fascinating and inspiring emotion which we are accustomed to call by the vague name romantic. It was during these same ten centuries that nationalities came into their modern being. It was at the close of these centuries that all the past at which we have been glancing together was wondrously summarised in that marvellous poem of which the substance is the final expression of mediæval literature and the style is the

primal expression of modern. I mean the Divine Comedy of Dante.

Mediæval though the spirit be in which he would fix forever the portentous past, the passionate present, and the eternal future, obedient to the mystic love which moves the sun and the other stars, there can be no doubt that his great work, in a modern vernacular, is at the same time the first persistent monument of what the subsequent literature of Europe was to be. Inevitably this literature has become a matter of numerous nationalities, each with its distinct and separate language. When we first approached the question of what European literature is—the literature of which English literature, and ours of America, is only a part—we named its five chief phases: the Italian, the French, the Spanish, the German, and our English itself. At no one time

throughout their six centuries of contemporaneous development have they all flourished equally. At different periods each has been stirred, in various ways, by forces seemingly peculiar to itself. We need no great keenness of vision, however, to perceive that, on the whole, the greater of these forces, however distorted in momentary aspects, have really been vitally common to them all. We have no time left us now to linger even over such magnificently memorable details as the chief names of European literature, apart from English, during the past six hundred years. We can only recall a very few of the most significant: Petrarch, for example, and Boccaccio; Ariosto and Machiavelli; Luther, Tasso, Cervantes, Rabelais, and Montaigne; Corneille, Molière, and Racine; Voltaire and Rousseau; Goethe and Schiller. All we can hope

to do more, here and now, is to recognise how profoundly literature and history are fused, and thus attempt to perceive some broadest traits of the six centuries throughout which Europe has incessantly expressed itself from the days of Dante to these times in which we ourselves live.

The broadest trait of all, I believe, is clear throughout them from beginning to end. From the Fourteenth Century to this Twentieth, of which no one now living may ever know the full course, the mind of Europe has been rebellious against the authority of tradition; it has sought to be reasonable—to know rather than to believe. This dominant spirit may, perhaps, be summarised as the critical; there has everywhere been a constant eagerness to see things as they really are. In the Fourteenth Century and the Fifteenth, this spirit showed

itself most characteristically in relation to the facts of civilised antiquity—of art and of culture. What resulted was that revival of antique ideals to which we give the name of Renaissance. In the Sixteenth Century, the critical spirit was applied most signally to matters not of historical and artistic tradition but of religious; and we should not summarise that century ill if we called it once for all the century of the Reformation. In the Seventeenth Century and the Eighteenth, the most ardent activities of the critical spirit were exhibited in matters of politics and of government; wherefore these centuries culminated in the still portentous fact of Revolution. During the Nineteenth Century, with its marvellously increased mastery of science, the critical spirit has been engaged most alertly and most passionately with the temporal welfare of human beings; you

and I were born, and shall die, in a period of which the dominant passion is for Reform. Again, it may seem to you that I have strayed from literature. Yet it is from the study of literature that I have been impelled to make these huge generalisations. Reflect, if you ever care to, on the names of the masters whom we have recalled together, from Francis Petrarch to Thomas Carlyle. You will marvel, I believe, at the precision with which you will find them to define these consecutive phases of the time spirit, working its way, for good or for ill, irresistibly.

Further than this we cannot go together now. All that is left me is to repeat, if I can, some summary of the message which, as a teacher, I have striven to bring to you who teach. Our daily work, we should all agree, must mostly seem humble and dreary. Yet

even though our study of literature, which we have taken as an example of any range of study whatsoever, seem at first abortive, it can lead us, we have seen, to ranges of thought where centuries have not yet sufficed humanity to attain the lofty level of certainty. They have thus led us to regions where you and I, as eager students, may forever mount upward, and where, so mounting, we may forever lead the students who shall follow us. If your work and mine, as students and as teachers, be faithfully done, it cannot fail to help the students of the future, just as our own work has been helped by the work of the students of the past.

A trite message, after all, this may seem; yet the very fact of its triteness goes far to prove both the truth of it and the need. If any of you have felt it needful and truthful, it has been

worth while. Surely, too, there could have been no happier moment for such a message than that which has here brought us together. What one faithful teacher has done for us who follow her is attested by the establishment of this lectureship in her memory, sustaining the work of her spirit long after her daily work has come to its peaceful end.

IV

THE STUDY OF EXPRESSION

A Commencement Address at the College of Charleston, South Carolina, 15 June, 1909.

First printed in the Charleston "Sunday News," 20 June, 1909.

IV

THE STUDY OF EXPRESSION

MR. PRESIDENT, AND GENTLEMEN OF THE COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON:

The honour you have done me comes with all the grace of unexpected renewal. Once before you were so kind as to invite me to take part in an occasion like this. No invitation was ever more welcome. All my life I had eagerly wished to know something of the South—not as a student, or a traveller, but as a human being, mingling for a little while with Southern fellow-countrymen in their habit as they live. There could have been no happier opportunity to do so than your invitation

brought me—few keener regrets than that with which I found myself compelled to leave long hope unfulfilled. That you should have cared to summon me again, and at a moment when I could respond to the summons, therefore means that what had seemed fatally lost is restored with a glow of hospitable reiteration never to be forgotten.

Nor is this all. In calling me from Harvard College to address men who have loyally pursued their studies in the College of Charleston, you have done something more than a friendly act from men to man, from colleagues to colleague, or from institution to institution; you have happily urged that for a little while, at a moment such as often lingers long in the memory of those in whose lives it marks an epoch, Massachusetts should speak to South Carolina, Boston to Charleston. There

could be no more hearty message of peace and goodwill.

Yet if you have supposed that I could speak to you in any official character, I can hardly fulfil your expectations. Throughout the career of the eminent man who has just withdrawn from the presidency of Harvard College, he has maintained there a remarkable degree of personal liberty. One and all of us have been free as air to say everywhere whatever seemed to us true or wise. With that privilege the very purity of our liberty has brought our authority to an end. None of us can pretend, any more than President Eliot has pretended, to speak for others. Whatever a Harvard man utters—except at the rare moments when he is charged with a formal academic mission, and therefore is told just what to say—must be taken as coming only

from him, and in no wise implicating even his nearest colleagues—far less the College, or the University, which we serve in common. What is more, our deepest community, at that immemorial nursery of traditional and extreme Protestantism, lies in tolerated divergence of opinion. No two of us think quite alike. We live together somehow, Radical and Conservative, Tory and Revolutionary, heretic and orthodox, at one only in faith that the truth shall prevail.

At a time like this, accordingly, I can bring you no message but my own. It is implicitly from the North, no doubt, for the reason that I have always lived there, seeing things from the angle whence Northerners of the past fifty years must perforce have observed the mysteries of time and space and eternity. It is implicitly from Massachusetts, because I was born there, and

have lived there most of my life. It is implicitly from Harvard where I not only took my degree, but where I have been a teacher since I was less than half my present age. I cannot speak to you, however, for Harvard or for Massachusetts, or for the North. I can speak only for myself, man to man. I come, in fine, as one whose mature years have been wholly passed amid American academic surroundings, to say what best I can at a moment when a little company of others are just emerging from such academic surroundings to confront hereafter, I suppose,—at least in most cases,—other and widely different conditions.

At such a moment one inevitably stops to think; and when one stops to think nowadays, one almost inevitably falls to asking oneself troublous questions. *Cui bono?* is among the most in-

sistently recurrent of them. We college men differ from the unnumbered majority of our fellow-citizens in that between the common routine of school training and the arduous reality of inexorable fact we have paused, through four years of something no longer youth and not yet manhood, to gather strength, memories, traditions, which shall help us through the years to come. How has this college interval helped us, after all? not a few of us must ask; what is the use of it? to whom has it done what manner of good?

Unless your experience hereabouts be widely different from any which has gladdened the region I come from—different, as well, from that of the students who year after year have made their way from the South, and from the West, and from elsewhere to pursue graduate studies at Harvard—a dis-

concerting fact must be acknowledged once for all. Men who have never been at college imagine that our college years have taught us something positive—how to read foreign languages, for example, how to appreciate literature and fine art, or how to practise with skill certain of the arts not called fine, how to apply science or to conduct affairs. They assume that an academic degree stamps us as somehow expert. We graduates of colleges have the sad misfortune to know better. Few of us, for example, who have studied French or German for years, can pretend to use a text-book in either language—far less turn to the literature of either, as a matter of pleasure. Hardly one of us unaided by translation, I venture to guess, can make much sense out of a page of Latin or of Greek. Very few could tell you, off-hand, the century in

which Herodotus wrote or Cicero, could distinguish between St. Gregory and Hildebrand, could give a clear account of Lady Jane Grey, could name the Presidents of the United States, could explain why no one who understands Elizabethan literature has ever supposed that the author of Bacon's Essays wrote "Hamlet" and the "Tempest," or could expound the principles of Descartes, of Locke, or of John Stuart Mill. Very few, either, could be trusted to make an accurate survey of land; to identify a mineral, a shrub, or a bone; to understand the published statement of a bank; or even to help a little brother through the perplexities of a new algebraic problem or geometrical proposition. Far from becoming expert anywhere during our college years, we are more likely to have lost what little pretension to expert knowl-

edge or power we may have possessed at school.

Even though we find ourselves, however, thus desperately remote from what other people expect us to be, we shall hardly differ among ourselves in gladness that we have had this pleasant interval between schooldays and life. Our gladness, too, will not be all because of the gently human phases of our college years—the friendships and the memories deep-rooted in our hearts. We shall be glad as well of something less palpable, less definite, yet hardly less certain. After all, common sense is rarely wrong, except when it makes the mistake of trying rationally to account for what it recognises. College, as common sense assures our whole country, is really worth while. Even though four years of college fail in general to make college men expert,

they manage somehow to stimulate or, at worst, not to repress what powers of leadership those fortunate human beings may have been born with. I do not mean that your leaders of public opinion, great or small, need academic degrees or experience, nor that your college man will not everywhere find others than college men to measure himself with, abundantly worth all the mettle that is in him. But the fact remains, and we all believe it sure to remain through generations to come, that when you call the roll of your classmates, ten, twenty, or fifty years after a commencement day like this, you will find surprisingly few of them, when you compare them with groups of men collected otherwise, who have failed to sustain themselves to the best of their powers. To use a cant expression of the moment, your col-

lege man is more than likely to make good.

Partly, beyond question, this is a matter of the still strenuous process of selection by which he has emerged from the mass of his schoolfellows and contemporaries. By no means everybody can sustain the initiatory test of entrance examinations or the recurrent scrutinies of any college course, however far from ideal in plan or in result. Partly, however, and to my mind far more profoundly, it seems due to a truth which all the disintegrating tendencies of modern education have as yet proved powerless to deny. Learning, to be sure, has been divided and subdivided, specialised and subspecialised, until a modern college catalogue, with its bewildering announcement of courses and instructors, reminds one of nothing so much as of those intri-

cately dissected pictures, innocent of guiding plan, which have lately proved alluring toys to grown-up children as well as to children pure and simple. Now learning, we should all agree, is not a toy; its analogy to these playthings, nevertheless, is more than superficial. What makes the pictures fascinating, tantalising if you will, is your certainty that each fragment, grotesque or rebellious though it may seem, really has its place in a scheme capable of reduction by intelligence to organised unity. Something similar is true of what we study, and more or less learn, at college. Each separate bit of it is presented to us single, distinct, apart; yet each, we dumbly know, has its final relation to every other. Alone, or in company, or with guidance, we must busy ourselves to put the pieces together, if they are ever to have much meaning.

Guidance, no doubt, is apt nowadays to be rather blind. Our guides often seem more interested in contemplating the outlines of their fragments than in trying to discover which will fit into which. None the less, I believe, your college man—and your college man, I mean, as distinguished not only from untrained men, but also from men whose training has been confined to technical schools—will rarely rest content until he can begin to discern what belongs where. Even though our teaching apparently strive to satisfy us with the ideal of perceiving things apart, it is powerless to prevent our impulse—and indeed, purposely or not, it often serves rather to stimulate our impulse—toward thinking things together.

If superlatives were not treacherous, I should be disposed to assert this power of thinking together things which other

men can only perceive apart the chief good, the chief end and aim, the chief justification of a college career, for all men not destined to accept such a career as professional. As an example of what I have in mind, we may turn to two fields of study usually presented nowadays as distinct—the fields of history and literature. Commonly, as we all know, they are taught and studied apart; and indeed, in certain aspects, they may perhaps be so studied most profitably. Otherwise, to go no further, there would be no reason for the existence of two admirable societies, which I respected equally until one of them abandoned itself to the excesses of reformed spelling—the American Historical Association and the Modern Language Association of America. In point of fact, however, everybody is aware that literature can never be completely

independent of historical conditions. Everything ever written, we must surely agree, was written at some definite time and in some definite place. History, we thus come to see, is the ultimate basis of all literature; just as all literature might be described as the voice of history.

Once begin thus to think of them together, and you will find it hard to think them apart. Remember, for example, that Marlowe's "Tamburlaine" belongs to the period of the Spanish Armada; that Wordsworth and Shelley and Byron felt the spiritual upheaval of the French Revolution; that the novels of Dickens came just after the Reform Bill; that Sidney Lanier was a devotedly loyal Confederate soldier. You will soon come to feel that these lasting poets and story-tellers could never have been what they were but for the tremendous his-

torical forces which surged about them. Try next to think of those forces as voiceless: and you will find them instantly begin to lose something of the vitality which now makes them undying. Or trace in imagination the career of Milton, until you can feel how the passionate aspiration of the English Puritans, dreaming that they could remould a nation in obedience to what they fervently believed the will of a Calvinistic God, exhausted itself through generations of mystical ecstasy and grim work, until only in his blind awakening to frustration of earthly hope the one great Puritan poet could finally breathe out the deathless lines of "Paradise Lost." History and literature, we grow to see, may be known apart, minutely as you will; they cannot be understood, and neither can begin to approach the full significance of

their mutual meaning, until we come to know them and to think of them inextricably and eternally together.

Now, though no one would pretend that modern college men, as a class, are thus given to thinking history and literature together, there can be little doubt that college men are better able to do so, are more disposed to do so, and—if we take them by and large—are more likely to do so than men who have never had college training. History and literature, too, we have considered only as a single illustrative example of a general truth. Almost any other fields of learning might have served our purpose quite as well. What we now call the principles of evolution, for instance, first evident in such natural sciences as astronomy or biology, prove illuminating in economics, in literature, in the fine arts—throughout the whole

baffling course of earthly progress from birth to death. Think of things together and you will presently find each to signify more than it could ever signify alone. Words themselves, the symbols of our thoughts, often seem, when we take them one by one, almost as meaningless as the letters which compose them for the eye. Put a few of them side by side, however, even as we are putting some together at this moment, and you will feel beyond dispute the magic power of composition.

The good old days when college training was still based on Latin—the true universal language of European history and tradition—are not yet so far past but that we may all remember what that familiar word literally means. It signifies exactly what we have been trying to define in our minds—the process of putting together. If we thus

agree to use it, for the moment, in its original sense, we may perhaps describe the most stimulating and the most enduring result of our college days as a strengthened power of composition. Your educated man has an inclination which may well grow into a yearning, even into a passion, for putting things, wherever he may find them, in the places where they best belong. To greater or less degree, he thereby becomes a composer of a philosophy. Your best philosophers, too, your wisest men, are those who compose at once most vigorously and most truly—with the least eccentricity and the most courage. The ideal end of such years as make up our college lives may be stated, indeed, as mastery of composition.

Already you may perhaps feel that I am playing on the word. Whatever composition may literally mean, you

might remind me, we use the word nowadays in a sense so definite that whoever attempts to use it otherwise comes near distortion of language. When any of us accustomed to American schools or colleges during the last generation hear the word *composition*, it must first of all suggest a specific fact —namely, certain formal and by no means always fruitful courses of study, which more or less willingly we have been compelled to pursue. Beyond peradventure it now associates itself principally with the ideas of words, of sentences, of paragraphs and the like—or, to use a cant phrase from the text-books, with the expression of thought and emotion in written words. This limitation of its meaning, too, is not the whole story. We are used to hearing of Latin composition, to be sure, of Greek composition, of French and German, Italian

and Spanish; you will find them all in any considerable announcement of college studies throughout America. By itself, however, the word composition suggests no foreign language whatsoever. The very fact that we speak of French composition, or of German, or of Italian, as a thing apart implies that each of them is different in our minds from all the others—individual, separate, distinct. By itself, the word *composition* unquestionably suggests to most of us the expression of thought and feeling in the written words of our own native language.

For our present purposes this accident is not unhappy. Quite to understand any such generalisations as we are now attempting, nothing can help us more than to scrutinise some specific example of what we have in mind. Here is one at hand. What is true of

composition in the broadest philosophical sense—where it is concerned with thinking together the universe, from the systems of astronomy to the molecules of physics—is true, in principle, of composition, when applied to articulate expression in words alone.

In this aspect it has the momentary advantage of familiarity; for at least throughout the life-time of any man now or lately, in an American college, it has thus been devotedly studied from the Atlantic to the Pacific. There are various reasons, accordingly, why we may do well, during our little while here together, to dwell on it as an example of what college training can do for us nowadays. Insomuch, furthermore, as this kind of illustration cannot be too specific, I shall ask no pardon for touching on it as it has come within my own observation at Harvard College.

I shall only ask you to remember what I said a little while ago—that I am by no means authorised to speak in the name of Harvard, where opinions sometimes seem as numerous as professors; nor even in the slightest degree to implicate any of my immediate colleagues, who are apt cordially to disagree not only with me, but with each other. What I say sets forth merely what one teacher has come to think and to believe concerning the study of literary expression—the phase in which the study of composition has chanced to come chiefly within his experience.

That experience is now considerable. Long before my time it was generally felt that Harvard men used their native language with little skill. The great and vital growth of Harvard during the forty years of President Eliot's administration has been bound up with his

belief that whoever does anything ill can be taught, and therefore ought to be taught, to do it well, or at least better. By the time when I was old enough to undertake responsible work, accordingly, the state of affairs at Harvard was peculiarly favourable to the study of literary composition, on the part of teachers and pupils alike. The need of it was acknowledged; the pursuit of it was encouraged; and the authorities gave us every aid in their power. Thus a little company of us attacked our task, just as more and more of us have attacked it ever since; and statistically, so far as anybody could infer from the President's Reports, we have been pretty successful. Years ago the number of students who had submitted to our teaching began to be counted not by the hundred but by the thousand. Such an experience must stimulate any

teacher to do his best in every way. We have all tried to.

Now it happened that about 1890, one of my personal efforts to do my best under these circumstances resulted in an attempt to generalise more clearly and systematically than others had done the principles of the art which I was attempting to teach. My consequent book, entitled "English Composition," embodied the results of ten years' experiment and thought. It was not particularly original, except that perhaps it collected and stated common material more intelligibly and rather more readably than was then usual. It set forth that the qualities of a good style are Clearness, Force, and Elegance; or, in other words, that whoever writes well ought to write so that you can understand him, so that he will not bore you, and so that he will please you. It set forth

that literary composition—that is, the putting together of words in sentences, or of sentences in paragraphs, or of paragraphs in chapters, and so on—may be guided toward the qualities which it ought to exemplify by more or less conscious and habitual observance of three cardinal principles, to which I gave the names of Unity, of Mass or Emphasis, and of Coherence. To continue the summary would be tedious. If the matter interest you the book survives; if the matter leave you indifferent, you may rest content that no human being would ever dream of counting this little volume among the books which everybody ought to know. The surprising five-foot shelf of President Eliot might grow a hundred times as long without finding room for it.

You may well wonder, accordingly, why I have had the temerity to trouble

you with it at all. My reason is that in my own experience, which is for the moment what I am trying to make clear, this not very important book has proved a landmark. It defines, as nothing less definite could define, a moment when, at least to me, the matter with which it deals looked doubly hopeful, in ways which the intervening nineteen years have disappointed. It expresses a state of gradually growing scholarship when one stops to generalise mostly for the sake of getting one's ideas in order, so that thereafter one may go on to generalise, and to learn, more and more; and it implies, from beginning to end, unshaken faith in the all-sufficient efficacy of its doctrine. To put the matter more simply, it indicates hardly any doubt that if Harvard teachers should bravely proceed with the work they had begun, Harvard students would end by

writing a great deal better than they have ever written yet.

The book appeared nineteen years ago. If you will pardon my complacency in saying so, it has stood the test of time. At this moment, I mean, so long after it was written, it seems to me as true as it seemed to begin with; and even my now ripened experience could make nothing much more useful for any who should desire my counsel about the matter it deals with. It disappoints me not for any positive reason; but only because nineteen laborious years have taught me so little more of the subject. In a general way, meanwhile, I have tried to keep aware of what other people have had to say about this matter of literary composition. The fact that I have come across nothing seriously to modify my views, or to alter my expression of them, except in verbal de-

tail, seems to me significant. Twenty years ago, composition, studied by itself, appeared full of unforeseen possibilities; now, as a subject of study, it has come to seem exhaustible by a single and not very arduous effort. The only new idea I have lately had about it is at once slight and on the whole unwelcome to my colleagues. In brief, as a teacher, I have come to think that honest students are likely nowadays to blunder into more study of literary composition than is good for them. I am accordingly disposed to advise, as a matter of general economy, that, in a given college year, no student should be allowed to count toward any degree more than one course of instruction in composition, no matter what language such a course be concerned with. The true principles of composition, as I apprehend them, apply equally to every

language ever devised by man; the differences in this aspect, between ancient languages and modern, and the differences of any languages—ancient or modern—among themselves, are mere accidents of idiom. So far as composition goes, what you learn in one you may apply in all or any. My colleagues, however, seem unanimously disposed to hold this opinion mistaken.

Taken by itself such reminiscence as I have indulged in may well appear trivially anecdotic. Taken in its relation to what we have had in mind before, however, it has, I think, a fairly definite significance—namely, that the principles of composition, at least when concerned with matters of literary expression, cannot long be studied fruitfully by themselves. The reason why is at once not far to seek, and on the whole illuminating; for you will find it applicable

to the process of composition in every imaginable phase. The very word composition, indeed, implies this reason why, studied by itself, the subject turns out to be sterile. When we study anything whatever by itself, we necessarily isolate it from everything else; in attending exclusively to composition, accordingly, we begin unwittingly to lose the habit, if we ever had one, of thinking it into relation with other matters. To put the case otherwise, paradoxically but almost exactly, over-concentrated attention to composition cannot help resulting in something like paralysis of power to compose. For if you have only one thing to put somewhere, you have nothing to put it together with.

All this might not have been fatally disappointing, the nineteen-year while, if the result of our efforts to teach lit-

erary composition at Harvard, however fraught with limitation for ourselves, had resulted in making Harvard students and Harvard graduates generally write with unobtrusive but certain skill. One would never dream of demanding from them incessant or even frequent literary creation. One might dare hope, however, that the faithfulness of our teaching and the regularity of their work—both of which I believe indisputable—might ultimately establish something like a firm standard of expression. Whether it has done so or not, I will leave you to judge.

At this moment I have before me a little set of critical papers, lately submitted to me, after several weeks' notice, by an advanced class in literature. I will take from them a half-dozen sentences, literally at random. Here is the first on which my eye lights: "His songs are

known and remembered by all, they are recited in the district school, and read around the fireside of the rich and the cultured." Here is the next: "Though he may not prove in time to be the greatest of American authors or the most representative, he certainly will hold a prominent place in this epoch of our literary history." The third to which I turn —they are all by different men—runs as follows: "Born into a small printing establishment, passing his boyhood among type fonts and the odor of printers' ink, engaging his young manhood in journalistic pursuits, he paved the way for future editorship, and, above all, learned to know the value of copy." A shade more sense of composition here, perhaps; but as to skill, we will not reason, but glance and pass. Our fourth example is less confused, and displays trace of intensity: "A French writer four years

ago said that the only receipt for creating interest in fiction nowadays is 'to smash the Ten Commandments,' but Lanier's genius shrank in moral recoil from the pollution of this desperate and devilish device." Fifthly comes the following: "Puritanic sternness and severity characterise the homes of a people who for time immemorial have been noted for their gentleness and sweetness of temper, and the concord in their home-life." It is fair to explain that the writer of these impressive words was endeavouring to show that Dr. Mitchell misunderstands Eighteenth Century Philadelphia Quakers; but we can hardly agree that the deserving young gentleman has made his point felicitously. Our sixth passage runs thus: "I take it that this very lack of appreciation of what we are and what we might be is the very fruitful source

of both mobs and murders and graft in every sphere of our social galaxy."

Now each of these six separate sentences from six different men is grammatically tolerable. Each is sensible, or at least rational. Each implies a certain degree of literary appreciation. Only one, however, indicates deliberate effort to compose,—to put a word, or a clause, or a phrase, where it really belongs,—and that is the most obviously unskilful of the whole half-dozen. Yet all these men have studied composition, as a thing apart; two of them, if I am not mistaken, have been held distinguished students thereof; and at least one of them has either taught the art, or proposed himself for the position of a teacher thereof. To use a technical term of my own, based on the fact that effective composition conscientiously or instinctively observes a few simple principles, a

melancholy conclusion seems to follow: the present result of our heroic experiment to teach composition by itself is a general habit of style, among our pupils, best described by the word *unprincipled*.

A curious example of what I have in mind has lately come to my notice in an interesting essay on Addison. The writer, though not, I believe, trained at Harvard, has certainly devoted faithful work elsewhere to the study and the teaching of composition, in which competent people have pronounced him expert; and there can be no question of his general culture and accomplishment. Yet, somehow, I found his essay tediously hard to read. A comparison of one passage with the text which it attempted to paraphrase showed me—and I hope will show you —why. It runs thus: "Within the essays, further divisions are made. The

beauties of the fourth book are considered under three heads: 'pictures of still life . . . machines . . . the conduct of Adam and Eve.' The tenth book is considered under four heads," and so on. Now that quoted passage is so far from Addisonian in effect that I could not help turning to the original to see what had been left out; and here is what Addison wrote: "We may consider the beauties of the fourth book"—not, you may observe, "The beauties of the fourth book are considered"—"under three heads. In the first are those pictures of still life which we meet with in the descriptions of Eden, Paradise, Adam's Bower, etc. In the next are the machines, which comprehend the speeches and behaviour of the good and bad angels. In the last is the conduct of Adam and Eve who are the principal actors in the poem."—So far

Mr. Addison. In the matter of summary, we may agree, his critic was accurate. The summary, however, no more gives the sense of the original than if the original had never gladdened the critic's eye. His eye I say intentionally; his hearing, I am told, is normal. From his method of expression, you might rationally have supposed him to have learned the arts of reading and of writing in an asylum for the Deaf and Dumb.

The wonder of it is that any one could write so insensitively who has long been under the influence of Addison—that any one could prove so supremely immune from literary contagion. Something beyond the frailty of human nature seems needful, to account for such robustness of resistance. Twenty or thirty years ago I should have attributed this callousness

to lack of training; I should unhesitatingly have prescribed course after course in English composition, much as grimly spectacled resident physicians in France or Germany bid you take bath after bath, and come back for more next year. Now, sadder if not wiser, I am rather disposed to wonder whether one chief difference between Addison and his critic may not be found in the simple fact that of two sensible human beings, both at the moments of their writing normally free from inspiration, the one had never studied English composition as a thing apart, and the other had so long studied and taught it as a thing apart that he had grown fatally unable to associate it in practice with anything else whatsoever. In that event, every new course of composition, given or taken, would probably aggravate his malady, or in-

crease his robustness of resistance, as you prefer. The tonic prescription would not be to study composition; it would be to compose.

For even though the study and the practice of composition, or of expression, as a thing apart generally prove unprofitable, nothing can avoid the fact that, if we are to grow into more knowledge and wisdom, it must be by some process of putting together things which belong together yet occur apart. Of such affinities, incessantly separate yet insistently demanding union, none is more teasingly constant than that which makes thought demand expression and expression demand thought. There is need, we saw a little while ago, even of history to understand literature, and of literature to understand history. There is more insistent need still of words if we would ever know the slightest shred

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

of either history or literature—apart or together. Nothing but words, duly composed, can ever tell us anything whatever about either of them. If in turn we would ever tell others anything about them, we must ourselves have recourse chiefly and strenuously to words. What thus turns out to be the case, too, concerning history and literature, is equally the case when we come to deal with the myriad other facts which we must put together, first for ourselves, and then for others, if our thought and our utterance in this world are to have any semblance of intellectual meaning. So far as we are alive and mean to make our lives dynamic, we must incessantly and courageously compose, in vastly various, vastly changing, always experimental, bravely vital ways.

Now it is quite possible that, after all my years of attempt to practise the doc-

trine I am trying to expound, I may seem here to have asserted that, although the study of composition is of prime importance, there is really no use in studying the subject at all. If I have produced any such paradoxical impression, I have blundered sadly. What has truly been in my mind is not that our courageous experiments in the teaching and the study of composition as a thing apart have been fruitless; it is rather that they have led to unforeseen conclusions. They have not yet demonstrated, to be sure, that composition cannot be fruitfully studied all alone; but they have gone so far toward such demonstration, I believe, that every bit of them will in due time thus be justified. It took alchemy to make chemistry; there is no reason to repine for any amount of experiment which may finally show

us how to do truly constructive work in composition.

Just what form this constructive work may take no one can surely prophesy. The problem involved in it is not solitary. Something like it seems evident everywhere throughout the range of modern education, which has discarded its old formulas and has not yet replaced them by valid substitutes. Not very long ago I touched on this general matter, in an address of which the subject was the Mystery of Education. To detail the substance of this discussion would be needless here. One phase of it, however, I may briefly recount, for it will help us, I think, to see how the study of composition and of expression may in time profitably be pursued; and, in pointing this out, I shall perhaps make clearer than at first the broad generalisations on which I begin to base it.

For the instant, I shall therefore ask you to forget what we have hitherto been considering and to inquire only what man is and where—man, the agent and the patient of all educational processes whatsoever. In the universe, in this world, in history, in time, in space, he is surrounded by a surgently moving environment to which we may give the name of force. Force is about him everywhere, incessantly and infinitely altering the conditions which seem least mutable. Here and now, for example, we have been together only for what seem a few every-day minutes. Yet even as I have uttered these words, some instant of time has flitted from the impenetrable future to the irrevocable past. The sun at this instant lights the world from another angle than that from whence his light came when we entered on this discussion.

The stars have moved somewhither in their courses; and men have died; and men-children have come into being; and all the mystery about us, eternally the same, has undergone some aspect of its eternal change. In this universe of stirring force man finds himself conscious. His task is as best he may to adapt himself to his environment of incessant change, and of change which in our time is swiftly and surely accelerating its historic rate of mutation.

Man's adaptation of himself to this environment of force I have ventured to liken to the office of a lens, which duly placed can accumulate and diffuse or concentrate rays of light. A conscious, flexible, animate focus of force, we may call man, surrounded by surgent rays or streams of that same force, sweeping him onward from past to future, yet swirling onward themselves, all

the while, at a rate increasingly beyond that at which they impel his little, flashing, mortal self. Somehow he can gather together a few of these rays or streams of force so vastly unimprisoned around him; and among the rays or streams which he can momentarily accumulate, in part, are those which we name science and history and literature. One phase of his focal task is to compose them, to fuse them. The other phase of it, and not the less worthy, is that on which we have been dwelling together here—the expression of that fusion in such manner as shall convey the full and living vitality of it to others than himself. To help us in this effort is the true purpose of the study of composition, a study which, if we pursue it aright, may well be held among the noblest of the ends and aims of earnest life.

Once assured that composition, even in words alone, deserves our loving care, we may accordingly find stimulus rather than discouragement in the fact that the principles of it are marvellously simple. The best workmen, they tell us, are those who need the fewest tools. The secret of skill is not knowledge but practice. Practice alone, I sometimes think, is better a hundredfold than knowledge alone; and practice hampered by conscious knowledge is halting enough at best; but practice guided by knowledge so mastered that the teachings of knowledge have become instinctive will bring us as near as the limitations of our earthly life can permit to the Divine ideal of perfection.

If these considerations have not been all wrong, we can now begin to perceive why, in the past, the study of

composition, and of expression, has been so far from satisfactory. The trouble has sprung from the fact that composition has generally been studied as if it were an empty abstraction, to be considered and used apart, to be laid aside when we have to do with other matters than itself. Thus we have come to consider it as something, like its own principles, which can be mastered once for all, and then contentedly forgotten. Instead, I hope we may now see, the very essence of its being lies in the truth that it must incessantly concern all things and all of us. Apprehension of its principles is well worth while, but only in so far as these principles shall serve us as guides in careers of unflinching and unremittent study. Our focal task, when we would duly express the rays of force collected and composed within our conscious selves,

is unendingly and stimulatingly experimental. It is to find our words and our phrases—to put together our dead symbols of living thought and emotion—until, as our need may be, they shall diffuse our meaning throughout the present and the future, or shall burn it deep in the one heart which we yearn to make responsive to our own.

All of which, I dare say, sounds too vague to have much meaning. Translated into every-day terms, you will find it to signify that Mr. Addison, for example, never penned a line without penning it as well as he could, considering at one and the same time what he had to say and whom he had to say it to; but that the critic of Mr. Addison, having duly considered at other times and places how things ought to be written on general principles, contented himself in this instance with the mere

act of penning, serenely regardless of how well he wrote, or of who might have the trouble of trying to make out what he meant. It is not Addison's positive style which is so admirable; it is the fact that throughout his work you can feel the masterly touch of one who composes not only his words and sentences, but all his powers, in the full though not sonorous harmony which has made him gently enduring.

That he writes with a grace and ease no longer quite the fashion is evidently true. So is the fact that this beautiful urbanity is a positively delightful quality. The final merit of his style, however, lies in nothing formal, but in the completeness of its adaptation to his meaning and his purpose. Captious temper, indeed, might sometimes wonder whether Addison's adaptation of his style to his concepts were not a

shade too fine, whether in admiration of its fineness a reader might not find attention distracted from the significance of the words to the words themselves. For my own part, I have rarely if ever found this the case. To me, accordingly, the Spectator—like Gulliver, or Othello, or Macaulay's Essay on Lord Clive, or the Newcomes—seems altogether admirable. The style of a masterpiece is excellent just because it never obtrudes itself between a reader and the meaning which it radiantly expresses. A comparison with not quite masterly works of eminent literature may define what I mean. One decisive reason why eccentric writing, like Carlyle's, or Browning's, or Walt Whitman's, or George Meredith's, wonderful though it be, can never command unqualified admiration is to be found in the unhappy fact that any obviously unusual

style interposes itself between our wits and the meaning which we are trying to apprehend. The ideal of expression is a momentary fusion of what the writer means with what the reader thinks and feels. Any grace, any ingenuity of style favourable to this end, is a merit. Any which distracts attention to itself is a blemish. Composition, to revert to the word with which we have been playing so long, should ideally be complete—fusing the knowledge, the character, the temper, the words of the writer or speaker with the attention and the full receptive power of readers and hearers.

Again we may seem to be losing ourselves in abstraction. To illustrate what I have in mind I may recall the story of a lawyer in his time eminent at the New England Bar. He was not a brilliant man, as I remember him, nor remarkable for profound learning or

exceptional power of intellect. His fundamental quality was honest, robust, and cheerful good sense. His professional achievement took the form of the frequent winning of doubtful cases, against adversaries whom off-hand you might have thought stronger than he. When asked once how he had managed to secure an unexpected verdict in spite of alertly able opposition, he answered very simply that it was by observing a rule taught him by experience. To impress a judge or a jury, he opined, you must hold their attention; and no one can hold it very long. When you rise to address them, accordingly, with the advantage of a novelty sure to attract it for the moment, you will do well to state your case while they are still attending to you. Then develop it as fully as they will let you. When their attention begins to wander, the

fault is not theirs, but yours; so never hesitate to bring your remarks to a close, no matter how much more you may have left to say. All the rest would be worse than a waste of words and time; it would be a bore; and no matter how just your judge, nor how honest your jury, human beings cannot help a little resentment against any fellow-creature who has bored them.

A colleague of mine at Harvard, who knew this old lawyer well, professes that he has applied the good man's principles to college lectures. If students do not follow a lecture, they learn nothing from it. If in a given class-room, the attention of many is obviously wandering from the matter in hand, the fault is not theirs, but the lecturer's. Very good. In such circumstances, my colleague declares, he attempts to regain the attention of his

pupils. If he succeeds, the lecture goes on. If he fails, he does not hesitate to dismiss his class, sadly admitting himself unable for the hapless moment so to compose what he has to say as to put it in contact with the wits of his hearers.

For composition, in its broadest meaning, implies something more than the tendency generally encouraged by the experience of college life—the life from which you are just emerging; the life which long ago made us elders something else than we should have been without it. Thereby, each in his degree, we have started on what should be our life-long task of thinking things together. This primal phase of composition is perhaps its most profound. Without the added vitality of articulate expression, however, it can come to little. We must compose in words the fusion of thought and emotion taught

us by learning and experience; and we must not rest content with the mere fact of expression until, so far as in us lies, what we are trying to express has been placed as close as we can place it to the thought and emotion of those others than ourselves whom we make effort to inform, to influence, to check, to guide, to inspire. One expresses best when one says what one means, when one holds attention, and when—whatever one's faults or infirmities—one rather attracts than repels the sympathy of those who attend.

Mastery of expression throughout is the ideal which we have striven to keep in mind; and there is hardly need to recall how the whole record of human history shows us few unchallenged masters of anything. So as I have spoken here to-day, you may well have felt an ironical contrast between the

somewhat elusive thoughts which I have attempted to imprison in words and the none too felicitous words themselves. If you will let yourselves feel, however, the earnestness of my effort not to waste the hour which your kindness has let us pass together, I venture to hope that it will linger happily in your memories, as it surely will linger in mine. For throughout it there has hovered around us one truth in which we all agree. The chief end of life, we may sometimes come to feel, is to put together and to bind together what without us might stay forever separate. There could hardly be a more gracious act to this end than the friendly invitation which has brought me to meet you here. Vague though my response to it may perhaps have seemed, I shall therefore trust you to understand that I have tried to do my responsive part of friend-

ship—the friendship now so happily binding together your college and mine, your State and mine, your future and mine, in the happy concord of our common country.

V

EDGAR ALLAN POE

An Address during the Poe Centenary at the University of Virginia, 19 January, 1909.

First printed in "The Book of the Poe Centenary."

V

EDGAR ALLAN POE

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

On the 19th of January, 1809, Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston. The fact, to be sure, has been disputed; for the scanty and defective vital records of that period make no mention of it. It remains, however, certain. Almost exactly a hundred years later, my friend, Mr. Walter Watkins, impelled by occasional statements that Poe was born elsewhere, collected, from the Boston newspapers of 1808 and 1809, notices of all the plays in which the parents of Poe appeared

during that season. These demonstrate that Mrs. Poe withdrew from the stage about Christmas time, 1808, and reappeared only on February 9th, 1809, when one of the newspapers congratulated her on her happy recovery from her confinement. This is apparently the most nearly contemporary record of Poe's birth. The researches of Mr. Watkins did not end here. All record of Poe's birthplace was supposed to have been lost; and indeed there is little likelihood that Poe himself ever knew just where it was. By examining the tax lists for 1808 and 1809, Mr. Watkins discovered that David Poe, the father of the poet, was taxed that year as resident in a house owned by one Henry Haviland, who had bought the property, a few years before, from a Mr. Haskins—a kinsman, I believe, of the mother of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The house was pulled down some fifty years ago, but Mr. Watkins has ascertained from the records that it was situated at what is now No. 62 Carver Street. In 1809, this was a respectable, though not a fashionable, part of the city. There Poe was born.

The circumstances of his career were restless; on the whole, they were solitary. Throughout his forty years of mortal sunlight and shadow he was never quite in accord with his surroundings. He was never tried by either of the tests for which ambition chiefly longs—the gravely happy test of wide responsibility, or the stimulatingly happy test of dominant success. Troublous from beginning to end his earthly life seems; to him this world could not often have smiled contagiously sympathetic. So much is clear; and a little more is clear as well. When he

sought sympathy, or found semblance of it, and thus for a little while could feel trouble assuaged, he could find it most nearly among those generous phases of Southern spirit which surrounded the happier years of his youth. There was little trace of it, for him, in the still half-Puritan atmosphere of that New England where he chanced, a stranger, to see the light.

So it was with deep and reverent sense of your Southern generosity that I received your grave and friendly summons to join with you here and now. Here, in this sanctuary of Virginia tradition, you have not scrupled to call me from the heart of New England, to pay tribute not only for myself, and for my own people, but tribute in the name of us all, to the memory of Poe. If one could only feel sure of performing such a task worthily, no task,

of duty or of privilege, could be more solemnly happy. For none could more wonderfully imply how Virginians and the people of New England—each still themselves—have so outlived their long spiritual misunderstandings of one another that with all our hearts we can gladly join together, as fellow countrymen, in celebrating the memory of one recognised everywhere as the fellow-countryman of us all.

Everywhere is a nowise hyperbolic word to describe the extent of Poe's constantly extending fame, sixty years after they laid him in his grave. His name is not only eminent in the literary history of Virginia, or of New York, or of America; it has proved itself among the very few of those native to America which have commanded and have justified admiration throughout the civilised world. Even this does not tell

the whole story. So far as we can now discern, he has securely risen above the mists of time and the fogs of accident. His work may appeal to you or leave you deaf; you may adulate it or scrutinise it, as you will; you may dispute as long and as fruitlessly as you please concerning its positive significance or the magnitude of its greatness. The one thing which you cannot do—the thing for which the moment is forever past—is to neglect it. Forever past, as well, all loyal Americans must gladly find the moment—if indeed there ever was a moment—when any of us could even for an instant regret it. There is no longer room for any manner of question that the writings of Poe are among the still few claims which America can as yet urge unchallenged in proof that our country has enriched permanent literature. Even with no

other reason than this, loyal Americans must already unite in cherishing his memory.

So true, so obvious, this must seem to-day that we are prone, in accepting it, to forget the marvel of it, as we forget the marvels of Nature—of sunrise, of sleep, of birth, of memory itself. The marvel of it, in truth, is none the less reverend because, like these, we need never find it miraculous. Happily for us all—happily for all the world—Poe is not an isolated, sporadic phenomenon in our national history. He was an American of the Nineteenth Century. If we ponder never so little on those commonplace words, we shall find them charged with stirring truth. To summarise the life of any nation, there is no better way than to turn to the successive centuries of its history, and to ask yourself, with no delay of

slow or painful study, what names and what memories, unborn at the beginning of these epochs, were in perpetual existence when they ended. When we thus consider our United States of America, the spiritual splendour of the Nineteenth Century glows amazing.

That Nineteenth Century, as we all gravely know, was by no means a period of national concord. Rather, far and wide, it was a period when the old order was fatally passing, yielding place to new. Thus inevitably, throughout our country, it was a period of honest and noble passion running to the inspiring height of spiritual tragedy. For no tragedy can be more superbly inspiring than that of epochs when earnestly devoted human beings, spiritually at one in loyalty to what they believe the changeless ideals of truth and of righteousness, are torn asunder

by outbreaks of such tremendous historic forces as make the mechanical forces of Nature seem only thin parables, imaging the vaster forces still which we vainly fancy to be immaterial. It is not until times like these begin to fade and subside into the irrevocable certainty of the past that we can begin to perceive the essential unity of their grandeur. Nothing less than such supreme ordeal of conflict can finally prove the quality and the measure of heroes; and in the stress and strain, no human vision can truly discern them all; but once proved deathless, the heroes stand side by side, immortally brethren. So, by and by, we come wondrously to perceive that we may honour our own heroes most worthily —most in the spirit which they truly embodied; most, I believe, as they themselves would finally bid us, if our

ears could still catch the accents of their voices—when we honour with them their brethren who, in the passing years of passion, seemed for a while their foes.

When we of America thus contemplate the Nineteenth Century, we cannot fail to rejoice in the memories it has left us. They are so many, so full of inspiration, so various in all but the steadfastness with which they withstand the deadening test of the years, that it would be distracting, and even invidious, to call the roll of our worthies at a moment like this. What more truly and deeply concerns us is an evident historical fact, generally true of all the human careers on which our heroic memories of the Nineteenth Century rest unshaken. Among those careers almost all—North and South, East and West—won, in their own

time, distinguished public recognition. What I have in mind we may best realise, perhaps, if for a moment we imagine ourselves in some Nineteenth Century congregation of our countrymen, similar to this where we are gathered together. Fancy, for instance, the companies assembled to welcome Lafayette, far and wide, during his last visit to our nation which he had helped call into being. Among the American dignitaries then in their maturity, and still remembered by others than their own descendants, almost every one would already have been well and widely known. A local stranger in any such assemblage, to whom his host should point out the more distinguished personages there present, would generally have found their names not only memorable but familiar, just as we should find them still. What would

thus have been the case in 1824 would have stayed so, too, five and twenty years later. The heroes of our olden time were mostly gladdened by the consciousness of recognised and acknowledged eminence.

Now, in contrast with them, let us try to imagine a figure which might perhaps have attracted the eye in some such American assemblage sixty-five years ago. Glancing about, you might very likely have observed a slight, alert man, with rather lank, dark hair, and deep, restless eyes. His aspect might hauntingly have attracted you, and set you to wondering whether he was young or old. On the whole you might probably have felt that he looked distrustful, defiant if not almost repellent, certainly not ingratiating or engagingly sympathetic. Yet there would have hovered about him an impalpable

atmosphere of fascination, which would have attracted your gaze back to him again and again; and each new scrutiny would have increased your impression that here was some one solitary, apart, not to be confused with the rest. He would hardly have been among the more notable personages, on the platform or at the high table. You might well have wondered whether anybody could tell you his name; and if, in answer to a question, your neighbour had believed that this was Edgar Allan Poe, you might very probably have thought the name unimportant. You would, perhaps, have had a general impression that he had written for a good many magazines, and the like,—that he had produced stories, and verses, and criticism,—but the chances are that you would not clearly have distinguished him unless as one of that

affluent company of *literati* who illustrated the '40's, and who are remembered now only because their names occur in essays preserved among Poe's collected works. Almost certainly he would hardly have impressed you as memorable. His rather inconspicuous solitude would not have seemed remarkable. Very likely, if you were a stranger thereabouts, you would have paid little more attention to his presence, but would rather have proceeded to inquire who else, of more solid quality, was then and there worth looking at.

All this might well have happened little more than sixty years ago; and though to some of us sixty years may still seem to stretch long, they are far from transcending the period of human memory. It would be by no means extraordinary if in this very com-

pany, here present, there were some who can remember the year 1845, or the election of President Taylor. Beyond question, every one of us has known, with something like contemporary intimacy, friends and relatives, only a little older than ourselves in seeming, to whom those years remained as vivid as you and I shall find the administration of President Roosevelt. That olden time, in fact, when amid such congregations as this, anywhere throughout America, the presence of Poe would hardly have been observed, has not quite faded from living recollection. At this moment, nevertheless, there is no need to explain anywhere why we are come together here, from far and wide, to honour his memory. Not only all of us here assembled, not only all Virginia, and all New York, and all New England, and

all our American countrymen beside, but the whole civilised world would instantly and eagerly recognise the certainty of his eminence. What he was, while still enmeshed in the perplexity of earthly circumstance, is already a matter of little else than idle curiosity. What he is admits of no dispute. So long as the name of America shall endure, the name of Poe will persist, in serene certainty, among those of our approved national worthies.

In all our history, I believe, there is no more salient contrast than this between the man in life and his immortal spirit. Just how or when the change came to be we need not trouble ourselves to dispute. It is enough for us, during this little while when we are together, that we let our thoughts dwell not on the Poe who was but on the Poe who is. Even then we shall do

best not to lose ourselves in conjectures concerning his positive magnitude, or his ultimate significance, when you measure his utterances with what we conceive to be absolute truth, or with the scheme of the eternities. We should be content if we can begin to assure ourselves of what he is, and of why.

The Poe whom we are met to celebrate is not the man, but his work. Furthermore, it is by no means all the work collected in those volumes where studious people can now trace, with what edification may ensue, the history, the progress, the ebb and the flow of his copious literary production. His extensive criticism need not detain or distract us; it is mostly concerned with ephemeral matters, forgotten ever since the years when it was written. His philosophical excursions, fantas-

tic or pregnant as the case may finally prove to be, we need hardly notice. The same is true concerning his copious exposition of literary principle, superficially grave, certainly ingenious, perhaps earnest, perhaps impishly fantastic. All of these, and more too, would inevitably force themselves on our consideration if we were attempting to revive the Poe who was. At this moment, however, we may neglect them as serenely as we may neglect scrutiny of outward and visible signs, of such questions as those of where he lived and when and for how long, of what he did in his private life, of whom he made love to and what he ate for dinner, of who cut his waistcoats, and of how—if at all—he paid for them.

The very suggestion of such details may well and truly seem beneath the dignity of this moment. They are

forced into conscious recognition, not by any tinge of inherent value, but because of the innocently intrusive pedantry now seemingly inseparable from the ideal of scholarship. We have passed, for the while, beyond the tyranny of that scholarly mood which used to exahust its energy in analysis of every word and syllable throughout the range of literature. From sheer reaction, I sometimes think, we are apt nowadays, when concerned with literature, to pass our time, even less fruitfully than if we were still grammarians, in researches little removed from the impertinence of gossip; and gossip concerning memorable men and women is only a shade less futile than gossip concerning the ephemeral beings who flit across our daily vision. So far as it can keep us awake from superstitious acceptance of superhuman myth,

it may perhaps have its own little salutary function. If it distract us from such moods of deeper sympathy as start the vagrant fancies of myth-makers, it does mischief as misleading as any ever wrought by formal pedantry, and without the lingering grace of traditional dignity. Your truly sound scholarship is concerned rather with such questions as we are properly concerned with here and now. Its highest hope, in literary matters, is to assert and to maintain persistent facts in their permanent values. In the case of Poe, for example, its chief questions are first of what from among his copious and varied work has incontestably survived the conditions of his human environment, and secondly of why this survival has occurred. What contribution did Poe make to lasting literature? Does this justly belong to the

literature not only of America but of the world? In brief, why is he so memorable as we all acknowledge by our presence here to-day?

Stated thus, these questions are not very hard to answer. The Poe of literature is the writer of a good many tales, or short stories, and of a few intensely individual, though not deeply confidential, poems. Stories and poems alike stand apart not only from all others in the literature of America, but—I believe we may agree—from any others anywhere. Some profoundly, some rather more superficially, they all possess, in their due degree, an impalpable quality which the most subtle of us might well be at pains to define, but which the most insensitive man imaginable can always, surely, recurrently feel. The most remarkable phase of the impression they thus make is prob-

ably the complete and absolute certainty of its recurrence. Turn, whenever you will and in whatever mood, to any of Poe's work which has proved more than ephemeral. Tale or poem, it may chance either to appeal to you or to repel you. In one mood you may think it inspired; in another, you may find it little better than prankishly artificial. You may praise it until dissent gape breathless at your superlatives; or you may relentlessly point out what you are pleased to believe its limitations, its artificialities, its patent defects. Even then, a very simple question must bring you to pause. Let anybody ask you what this piece of literature is like, or what is like it—let anybody ask with what we should match it. Whether you love it or are tempted to disdain it, you must be forced to the admission that it is almost unique.

Whatever its ultimate significance, the better work of Poe remains altogether itself, and therefore altogether his. This gleams the more vividly when you come to recognise how his individuality asserts itself to you, whatever your own passing mood, under all imaginable conditions. The utterance of Poe is as incontestably, as triumphantly itself as is the note of a song bird—as poets abroad have found the music of the skylark, or of the nightingale, or as our own country-folk find the call of the whippoorwill echoing through the twilight of American woods.

His individuality, the while, is of a kind for which our language hardly affords a name more exact than the name poetic. The accident that we are generally accustomed to confuse the spirit of poetry with some common features of poetic structure can mis-

lead us only for a moment. Poetry is not essentially a matter of rhyme or metre, of measure and quantity in sound or syllable. The essence of it is not material but spiritual. There are few more comprehensive descriptions of it than the most familiar in the varied range of English literature:

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact:—
One sees more devils than vast Hell can hold,—
That is, the madman; the lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt;
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth
to heaven;
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

In the literature of America, and indeed throughout that of the English language, you will be at pains to point

out utterances more illustrative of these lines—I had almost said more definitive of them—than you shall find in the tales and the poems of Poe at their surviving best. Momentarily illusory though his concrete touches may sometimes make his tales—and he possessed, to a rare degree, the power of arousing "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith" —the substance of his enduring fantasies may always be reduced to the forms of things unknown, bodied forth by sheer power of imagination. To these airy nothings the cunning of his pen, turning them to shapes, gives local habitations and names so distinct and so vivid that now and again you must be loath to believe them, in final analysis, substantially unreal. Yet unreal they always prove at last, phantasmally and hauntingly immaterial. They

are like figured tapestries spun and woven, warp and woof, from such stuff as dreams are made of. Only the dreams are not quite our own. The dreamer who has dreamed them is the poet who has woven them into this fabric, making them now forever ours as well as his. Without his own innermost life they could never have come into being at all. Without his consummate craftsmanship, itself almost a miracle, they must have hovered invisibly beyond the range of all other consciousness than his who dreamed them. Dreamer and craftsman alike, and supreme, it is he, and none but he, who can make us feel, in certain most memorable phases, the fascinating, fantastic, elusive, incessant mystery of that which must forever environ human consciousness, unseen, unknown, impalpable, implacable, undeniable.

The mood we are thus attempting to define is bafflingly elusive; it has no precise substance, no organic or articulate form. It is essentially a concept not of reason, or even of pervasive human emotion, but only of poetry—a subtly phantasmal state of spirit, evocable only by the poet who has been endowed with power to call it from the vasty deep where, except for him, it must have lurked in secret forever. If it were not unique, it could not be itself; for it would not be quite his, and whatever is not quite his is not his at all. So much we may confidently assert.

If we should permit ourselves, the while, either to rest with the assertion, or to stray in fancy through conclusion after conclusion toward which it may have seemed to lead us, we should remain or wander mischievously far from the truth. That Poe's imagination was soli-

tary, like so much of the circumstance of his life, we need not deny or dispute. Clearly, nevertheless, he lived his solitary life not in some fantastic nowhere, but amid the undeniably recorded realities of these United States of America during the first half of the Nineteenth Century. It is equally clear that throughout the years when his solitary poetic imagination was giving to its airy nothings their local habitations and their names, countless other poetic imaginations, at home and abroad, were striving to do likewise, each in its own way and fashion. Solitary, apart, almost defiant though the aspect of Poe may have seemed, isolated though we may still find the records of his life or the creatures of his imagination, he was never anachronistic. Even the visual image of his restless presence, which we tried to call up a little while

ago, will prove on scrutiny not only individual, but outwardly cast in the form and the habit of its own time—to the very decade and year of the almanac. With his dreams, and with the magic fabrics into which he wrought them, the case is much the same. Neither dreams nor fabrics, any more than his bodily presence, could have been quite themselves—and still less could the dreams and the fabrics have combined forever in their wondrous poetic harmonies — during any other epoch than that wherein Poe lived and moved and had his being.

What I mean must soon be evident if we stop to seek a general name for the kind of poetical mood which Poe could always evoke in so specific a form and degree. The word is instantly at hand, inexact and canting if you will, but undeniable. It is the word which

his contemporaries might carelessly, yet not untruly, have applied to his personal appearance, alluring to the eye if only for the quiet defiance of his temperamental solitude. It is the word by which we might most fitly have characterised such impulsive curiosity as should have impelled us, if we had seen him, to inquire who this mysterious-looking stranger might be. It is the word—misused, teasing, filmily evasive—by which we are still apt indefinitely to define the general æsthetic temper of his time, all over the European and American world. We use it concerning every manner of emotion and of conduct, and the countless phases of literature or of the other fine arts throughout their whole protean ranges of expression. You will have guessed already, long before I shall have come to utter it, the word thus

hovering in all our minds—the word romantic.

If we should hereupon attempt formally to define what this familiar word means, there would be no hope left us. Turn, as widely as you will, to dictionaries, to encyclopædias, to volumes, and to libraries of volumes. Each may throw its ray of light on the matter; none will completely illuminate it or irradiate. You might as well seek words which should comprehend, in descriptive finality, the full, delicate, sensuous truth of the savour of a fruit or of the scent of a flower. Yet, for all this, there are aspects of romanticism on which we may helpfully dwell; and of these the first is an acknowledged matter of history. Throughout all parts of the world then dominated by European tradition, the temper of the first half of the Nineteenth Century was

predominantly romantic. This was nowhere more evident than in the spontaneous outburst of poetry which, in less than twenty years, enriched the roll of English poets with the names of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Byron, and Scott. Now the way in which this period of poetry was lately described in an American announcement of teaching may help us to perceive, with a little more approach to precision, one feature of what romanticism everywhere means. Some worthy professor, doubtless chary of indefinite terms, chose to describe the romantic poets as those of the period when the individual spirit revived in English literature. Poetic or not, this sound instructor of youth was historically right. The very essence of romanticism lies in passionate assertion of literary or artistic individuality. Where-

fore, as we can now begin to feel sure, that romantic isolation of Poe's has double significance; it not only marks him, apart from others, as individual, but at the same time it defines him as an individual of his own romantic period.

We shall not go astray, then, if we ponder for a little while on this whole romantic generation. Before long, we may contentfully agree that the individualism of the romantic poets resulted everywhere from their passionate declaration of independence from outworn poetic authority. The precise form of poetic authority from which they fervently broke free was the pseudo-classic tradition of the Eighteenth Century—in matters literary a period of formal rhetorical decency, and of a cool common-sense which had little mercy for the vagaries of uncontrolled æsthetic emotion.

Already we may well feel insecure. We are straying, beyond peradventure, into dangerously elusive generalisation, interminably debatable. Yet, if our present line of thought is to lead us anywhere, we must not hesitate to generalise more boldly still. That same Eighteenth Century, from which romanticism broke free, was not a sporadic and intrusive episode in the history of European culture; it was the culmination of a period at least five hundred years long. This period began when the reviving critical scholarship of the Renaissance brought back to the dominant upper consciousness of Europe a vivid understanding of the facts of classical antiquity; and when, so doing, it began to suppress the vigorous and splendid body of intervening tradition and temper to which we have consequently given the name of medi-

æval. In matters literary, at least, the spirit which began with the Renaissance persisted until the Revolution of the dying Eighteenth Century prepared the way for that Nineteenth Century, of romantic freedom, wherein Poe lived and did his living work.

Already we can begin to see that there was some analogy between the Middle Ages, which preceded the Renaissance, and the epoch of romanticism which ensued after the Eighteenth Century. Both periods, at least, were free—each in its own way—from the intellectual control of such formal classicism or pseudo-classicism as intervened. A little closer scrutiny of the Middle Ages may therefore help us to appreciate what Nineteenth Century romanticism meant. Throughout that whole mediæval period, we may soon agree, the intellect of Europe was

authoritatively forbidden to exert itself beyond narrowly fixed and rigid limits. European emotion, meanwhile, was permitted vagrant and luxuriant freedom of range and of expression. It might wander wherever it would.

In contrast with this period, we can now begin to see, the Renaissance may be conceived as an intellectual declaration of independence; and through a full five hundred years, the intellect of Europe was increasingly free. Its very freedom made it, in turn, tyrannical. At least in the matters of temper and of fashion, it repressed, controlled, or ignored the ranges of emotion which had flourished during its subjection. In literature its tyranny extended far and wide. Though for a while thought was permitted to range more and more unfettered, emotion was at best sentimentalised. So, when

the centuries of tyranny were past, poetry, if it were ever to regain full freedom of emotional existence, if it were ever to enjoy again the fine frenzy of creation, needed more than independence. To revive the spirit which should vitally reanimate its enfranchisement it needed to drink again from the fountains for which it had thirsted for hundreds of years; it must revert to something like the unfettered emotional freedom of the Middle Ages.

To put the case a little more distinctly, the romanticism of the Nineteenth Century could be its true self only when to the intellectual maturity developed by five hundred years of classical culture it could add full and eager sympathy with the tremendous emotions of the Middle Ages, inevitably ancestral to all modernity. So the instinct was profoundly vital which directed the en-

thusiasm of poets to mediæval themes and traditions, even though these were imperfectly understood. The inspiration derived from them came not so much from any detail of their actual historical circumstances as from their instant, obvious remoteness from the common-sense facts of daily experience—matters judiciously to be handled only by the colourless activity of intellect. It was remoteness from actuality, above all else, which made romantic your romantic ruins and romantic villains, your romantic heroines, your romantic passions, and your romantic aspirations. Yet even your most romantic poet must give the airy nothings of his imagination a local habitation and a name. Unreal and fantastic though they might be, they must possess at least some semblance of reality; and this semblance, whether bodily or spir-

itual, normally assumed a mediæval guise.

Throughout Europe such semblance could always be guided, controlled, and regulated by the pervasive presence everywhere of relics, material or traditional, of the mediæval times thus at length welcomed back to the light. So far as the full romantic literature of Europe deals with mediæval matters, accordingly, or so far as intentionally or instinctively it reverts to mediæval temper, it has a kind of solidity hardly to be found in the poetic utterance of its contemporary America. For, at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, America was not only consciously further than Europe from all the common roots of our ancestral humanity; it possessed hardly a line of what is now accepted as our national literature. As patriots and as men of their time, the

poets of America were called on to add their part to romantic expression. To give their expression semblance of reality they had no mediæval relics to guide them, nor enduring local traditions, thick and strong about them. They were compelled to rely on sheer force of creative imagination. Pretentious as that phrase may sound, it is animated by a spirit of humility. Its purpose is in no wise to claim superiority for the romantic literary achievement of our country. It is rather, by stating the magnitude of our national task, to explain our comparative lack of robust solidity, and to indicate why the peculiar note of our country must inevitably have been a note of our singular, though not necessarily of powerful, creative purity.

Now just such creative purity is evidently characteristic of Poe. It may

sometimes have seemed that among our eminent men of letters he is the least obviously American. A little while ago, indeed, when I again turned through all the pages of his collected works, I was freshly surprised to find how little explicit trace they bore of the precise environment where they were written. Throughout all their length, it seemed, there was not a single complete page on which a stranger might rest proof that it had come to the light in this country. The first example which occurs to me—it happens to be also the most generally familiar—will show you what I have in mind: the mysterious chamber where the Raven forces uncanny entrance is not American. The image of it originated, perhaps, in a room still pointed out. Yet, so far as the atmosphere of it is concerned, that room might have been

anywhere; or rather, as it lives far and wide, it is surely nowhere. Yet, all the while, it has a strange semblance of reality. What is true here proves true throughout. The Paris of Poe's detective stories is no real Paris; the House of Usher never stood, or fell, on any earthly continent; Poe's Maelstrom whirls as fantastic as the balloon or the moon of Hans Pfaal. One might go on unceasingly, recalling at random impression after impression, vivid as the most vivid of dreams, and always as impalpable. There is nowhere else romantic fantasy so securely remote from all constraining taint of literal reality; there is none anywhere more unconditioned in its creative freedom.

Thus, paradoxical though the thought may at first seem, Poe tacitly, but clearly and triumphantly, asserts his nationality. No other romanticism of

the Nineteenth Century was ever so serenely free from limitation of material condition and tradition; none, therefore, was so indisputably what the native romanticism of America must inevitably have been. Call his work significant, if you like, or call it unmeaning; decide that it is true or false, as you will, in ethical or artistic purpose. Nothing can alter its wondrous independence of all but deliberately accepted artistic limitations. In this supreme artistic purity lies not only the chief secret of its wide appeal, but at the same time the subtle trait which marks it as the product of its own time, and of its own time nowhere else than here in America, our common country.

American though Poe's utterance be, the while, it stays elusive. When one tries to group it with any other utterance of his time, one feels again

and afresh the impression of its temperamental solitude. This solitude is far from prophetic or austere; it is as remote as possible from that of a voice crying in the wilderness. Nor indeed was America, in Poe's time, any longer a wilderness wherein a poet should seem a stranger. Even though when the Nineteenth Century began there was hardly such a thing as literature in America, the years of Poe's life brought us rather copiousness than dearth of national expression. As a New Englander, for example, I may perhaps be pardoned for reminding you that in the year 1830 Boston could not have shown you a single recognized volume to demonstrate that it was ever to be a centre of purely literary importance. Twenty years later, when Poe died, the region of Boston had already produced, in pure literature, the fully developed charac-

ters, though not yet the complete and rounded work, of Emerson, and Longfellow, and Lowell, and Holmes, and Whittier, and Hawthorne.

For the moment, I call this group to mind only that we may more clearly perceive the peculiar individuality of Poe. In many aspects, each of the New England group was individual, enough and to spare; nobody who ever knew them could long confuse one with another. Yet individual though they were, none of them ever seems quite solitary or isolated. You rarely think of any among them as standing apart from the rest, nor yet from the historical, the social, the religious or the philosophic conditions which brought them all to the point of poetic utterance. Now Poe was in every sense their contemporary; yet the moment you gladly yield yourself to the contagion of his poetic sym-

pathy, you find yourself alone with him —æsthetically solitary. You might fancy yourself for the while fantastically disembodied—a waking wanderer in some region of unalloyed dreams. American though he be, beyond any question, and a man of his time as well, he proves, beyond all other Americans throughout the growingly illustrious roll of our national letters, immune from imprisonment within any classifying formula which should surely include any other than his own haunting and fascinating self.

This isolation might at first seem a token of weakness. Enchanting as the fascination of Poe must forever be—even to those who strive to resist it and give us dozens of wise pages to prove him undeserving of such attention—the most ardent of his admirers can hardly maintain his work to be domi-

nant or commanding. Except for the pleasure it gives you, it leaves you little moved; it does not meddle with your philosophy, or modify your rules of conduct. Its power lies altogether in the strange excellence of its peculiar beauty; and even though the most ethical poet of his contemporary New England has immortally assured us that beauty is its own excuse for being, we can hardly forget that Emerson's aphorism sprang from contemplation of a wild flower, in the exquisite perfection of ephemeral fragility. A slight thing some might thus come to fancy the isolated work of Poe—the poet of Nineteenth Century America whose spirit hovered most persistently remote from actuality.

If such mood should threaten to possess us, even for a little while, the concourse here gathered together should

surely set us free. That spirit which hovered aloof sixty and seventy years ago is hovering still. It shall hover, we can now confidently assert, through centuries unending. The solitude of weakness, or of fragility, is no such solitude as this; weak and fragile solitude vanishes with its earthly self, leaving no void behind. Solitude which persists as Poe's is persisting proves itself by the very tenacity of its persistence to be the solitude of unflagging and independent strength. Such strength as this is sure token of poetic greatness. We may grow more confident than ever. We may unhesitatingly assert Poe not only American, but great.

So we come to one further question, nearer to us, as fellow-countrymen, than those on which we have touched before. It is the question of just where the enduring work of this

great American poet should be placed in the temperamental history of our country—of just what phase it may be held to express of the national spirit of America.

That national spirit—the spirit which animates and inspires the life of our native land—has had a solemn and a tragic history. From the very beginning of our national growth, historic circumstance at once prevented any spiritual centralisation of our national life, and encouraged in diverse regions, equally essential to the completeness of our national existence, separate spiritual centres, each true to itself and for that very reason defiant of others. So far as the separate phases of our national spirit have ever been able to meet one another open-hearted, they have marvelled to know the true depth of their communion. Open-hearted meet-

ing, however, has rarely been possible; and throughout the Nineteenth Century —the century in which Poe lived and wrought—it was hardly possible at all. Americans were brethren, as they were brethren before, as they are brethren now, as they shall stay brethren, God willing, through centuries to come. For the while, however, their brotherhood was sadly turbulent. They believed that they spoke a common language. The accents of it sounded familiar to the ears of all. Yet the meanings which those accents were bidden to carry seemed writhed into distortion on their way to the very ears which were straining to catch them. It was an epoch, we must sadly grant, of a Babel of the spirit.

So, throughout Poe's time, there was hardly one among the many whom the time held greater than he to whose voice

the united spirit of our country could ever unhesitatingly and harmoniously respond. What I have in mind may well have occurred to you, of Virginia, when a little while ago I named the six chief literary worthies of New England in the Nineteenth Century. They were contemporaries of Poe. They were honest men and faithful poets. They never hesitated to utter, with all their hearts, what they devotedly believed to be the truth. Every one of them, too, was immemorially American. Not one of them cherished any ancestral tradition but was native to this country, since the far-off days of King Charles the First. In every one of them, accordingly, any American—North or South, East or West—must surely find utterances heroically true to the idealism ancestrally and peculiarly our own. Yet it would be mischievous folly to

pretend that such utterances, speaking for us all, can ever tell the whole story of the New England poets. They were not only Americans, as we all are; they were Americans of Nineteenth Century New England. As such they could not have been the honest men they were if they had failed to concern themselves passionately with the irrepressible disputes and conflicts of their tragic times. They could not so concern themselves without utterance after utterance fatally sure to provoke passionate response, or passionate revulsion in fellow-countrymen of traditions other than their own.

Even this sad truth hardly includes the limitation of their localism. Turn to their quieter passages, descriptive or gently anecdotic. Strong, simple, sincere, admirable though these be, they are excellent, we must freely grant, chiefly because they could have been made no-

where else than just where they were. In New England, for example, there was never a native human being who could fail to recognise that "Snow Bound" was a genuine utterance straight from the stout heart of his own people; nor yet one, I believe, who, smile though he might at his own sentimentality, could resist the appeal of the "Village Blacksmith." We may well doubt, however, whether any Southern reader, in those old times, could have helped feeling that these verses—as surely as those of Burns, let us say, or of Wordsworth—came from other regions than those familiar to his daily life.

The literature of New England, in brief, American though we may all gladly assert it in its nobler phases, is, first of all, not American or national, but local. What is thus true of New England is generally true, I believe, of

literary expression throughout America. Turn, if you will, to the two memorable writers of New York during the first quarter of the Nineteenth Century—Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper. They were good men, and honest men of letters, and admirable story-tellers. Neither of them, however, wasted any love on his neighbours a little to the eastward; both hated the unwinsome surface of decadent Puritanism; and neither understood the mystic fervour of the Puritan spirit. So, even to this day, a sensitive reader in New England will now and again discover, in Irving or in Cooper, passages or turns of phrase which shall still set his blood faintly tingling with resentment. Whatever the positive merit, whatever the sturdy honesty of most American expression in the Nineteenth Century, it lacked conciliatory breadth

of feeling. Its intensity of localism marks it, whatever the peacefulness of its outward guise, as the utterance of a fatally discordant time.

Now it is from this same discordant time that the works of Poe have come down to us; and no work could have been much less inspired by the local traditions and temper of New England. To his vagrant and solitary spirit, indeed, those traditions must have been abhorrent. New England people, too, would probably have liked him as little as he liked them. You might well expect that even now, when the younger generations of New England turn to his tales or his poems, sparks of resentment might begin to rekindle. In one sense, perhaps, they may seem to; for Poe's individuality is too intense for universal appeal. You will find readers in New England just

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as you will find readers elsewhere, who stay deaf to the haunting music of his verse and blind to the wreathing films of his unearthly fantasy. Such lack of sympathy, however, you will never find to be a matter of ancestral tradition or of local prejudice or of any sectional limitation; it will prove wholly and unconditionally to be a matter only of individual temperament. Among the enduring writers of Nineteenth Century America, Poe stands unique.

Inevitably of his country and of his time, he eludes all limitation of more narrow scope or circumstance. Of all, I believe, he is the only one to whom, in his own day, all America might confidently have turned, as all America may confidently turn still, and forever, with certainty of finding no line, no word, no quiver of thought or of feeling

which should arouse or revive the consciousness or the memory of our tragic national discords, now happily for all alike heroic matters of the past. The more we dwell on the enduring work of this great American poet, the more clearly this virtue of it must shine before us all. In the temperamental history of our country, it is he, and he alone, as yet, who is not local but surely, enduringly national.

As I thus grow to reverence in him a wondrous harbinger of American spiritual reunion, I find hovering in my fancy some lines of his which, once heard, can never be quite forgotten. To him, I believe, they must have seemed only a thing of beauty. He would have been impatient of the suggestion that any one should ever read into them the prose of deeper significance. It was song, and only song,

which possessed him when he wrote the words:

> If I could dwell
> Where Israfel
> Hath dwelt, and he where I,
> He might not sing so wildly well
> A mortal melody,
> While a bolder note than this might swell
> From my lyre within the sky.

Is it too much to fancy, nevertheless, that to-day we can hear that bolder note swelling about us as we meet here in communion? None could be purer, none more sweet; and, beyond the shadow of a doubt, none could more serenely help to resolve the discords of his fellow-countrymen into their final harmony.

VI

DE PRÆSIDE MAGNIFICO

A Poem delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa
Society of Harvard College, July 1, 1909.
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VI

DE PRÆSIDE MAGNIFICO

Once first alone, long first amid the peers
Who cluster thickening through the swift-winged years,
Our college, rich with memories all our own,
Must ever stay for us the first alone.
For, while the sunlight gleams about us still,
Even though the shadows hover, as they will,
Nearer and nearer, all our bright array
Of yesterdays forever yesterday
Can never fade, so radiant must be
The magic of their diuturnity

One seems like yesterday indeed, although
They tell us it was forty years ago
When we awoke to see the June sun shine
On Class Day for the Class of Sixty-nine.
Seniors, resplendent in their white cravats,
Their black dress-clothes, their glossy beaver hats,
Heard Francis Peabody, a godly youth,
Proclaim in church the sanctity of truth;

While Bowditch, fair-moustached, and slight of girth,
As Marshal was the dearest thing on earth—
This was the whispered comment of a girl,
With waterfall and pretty, dangling curl.
And Fiske, suppressing evident alarms,
Heard wavering voices chant his Ode's endearing charms.

To youngsters then all Harvard seemed a dream
Of dignity and strawberries and cream.
To elder folks, who knows? They bear the stars
Who bore the burden then, and little mars
Their distant purity. One to survive—
A Sophomore in Seventeen Ninety-five—
Had watched our college wax and wane until
The blameless days of guileless Thomas Hill;
Willard and Webber were of those he knew.
And Kirkland hobbled still, almost in view
Of half-closed eyes; and Quincy, marble now,
Seemed breathing, with his tall, Olympian brow;
Like Everett, who had given to every place
Honour could lavish new, peculiar grace.
And when a graduate rose to make remarks,
Likely as not, he would touch on Jared Sparks,
Or mention, as if still enthralled thereby,
That shrewd old Walker's wisely twinkling eye;
And Felton's wit had hardly ceased to speak
The bright humanity of human Greek

These were the presidents they knew, and there
Before them Parson Turell's empty chair
Awaited, as it need no more await,
One who should sit therein securely great.

Securely great we know him now, and they
Who, doubtful then, bear on the stars to-day
Shining before us, came to know him so
Before they went the way we all must go.
For he has conquered doubt, perplexity,
Misunderstanding; he has lived to see
Ten college generations, in acclaim
Harmonious, greet the honour of his name.
Not all at once: he heard his call to strife
Just mid-way in the journey of our life—
An age held boyish nowadays—and he
Kept his own counsel perseveringly.
His elders brought him wisdom's treasured lore;
His mates—if mates there were—were even more
Prone to advise, with inexperience
Masked in the sturdy guise of common-sense;
And students, thronging hither year by year,
Clamored to keep what always had been here.
He listened patiently to all, to all
Gave what he deemed their due, and therewithal
Went his own way serene. Election
He held, almost with Calvin, was the one

Great beyond [illegible] his fiery glow
But there [illegible]'s sunset hour [illegible]
He seemed [illegible] breathed its [illegible]
That if [illegible] gleaming [illegible]
In untold [illegible] and New England [illegible]
You and [illegible] of foreign [illegible]
To [illegible] with the benignant [illegible]
He gave [illegible]
He [illegible] promise; his [illegible]
Remain [illegible] irradiate—the [illegible]
But [illegible] hope at last
In the [illegible] plumbings of [illegible]
He [illegible] future eternal [illegible]
So [illegible]
As [illegible]
We [illegible] has brought us [illegible]
Hea[illegible], world-old [illegible]
Cha[illegible]—a world [illegible]
And [illegible] with [illegible]
Wh[illegible], only a [illegible]
[illegible] than elder [illegible]
[illegible] deem so; but [illegible]
[illegible] has hid us all. "Despair"
[illegible] world look [illegible]
[illegible] surface with [illegible]
[illegible] there shall [illegible]
[illegible] good surpasses [illegible]

For what he held the truth, he has persevered
Saintly in fervid faith, when others feared,
Fully assured, when others doubted still,
That human good surpasses human ill.
So, would you know his mission, and the need
He has fulfilled, recall that grisly creed
The reverent Pilgrim Fathers trembling bore
From sinful Europe to our desert shore.
Calvin had taught them in their earlier home,
As grim Augustine taught imperial Rome,
How God disdained, with justly deathless wrath,
The seed of Adam scattered by the path
Where they must totter on and still revere
His majesty in consecrated fear.
Their lives were simple, and their manners stern;
They tried to do God's will; their sons, in turn;
Their children's children, too—unwitting race
Of chosen vessels of abounding grace.
Then, when men's wondering eyes began to see
In man the image of divinity,
And so their primal faith could almost seem
Phantasmagoric, like an evil dream,
Unflinching Edwards, heedless of the time,
Rose with his logic, terribly sublime,
Revived the might of Calvin's drooping God,
And kept them in the ways their fathers trod.

Supreme awhile, ere long his fiery glow
Proved that of Calvin's sunset here below;
For when our nation breathed its morning air,
Thrilled with the glories gleaming everywhere,
Ethereal Channing, staid New England saint,
Born to an age still pure of foreign taint,
Surveyed mankind with the benignant eye
Of Unitarian divinity.
His was the voice of promise; his white flame
Made our new world irradiate—the same
In purity, in buoyant hope at last
Freed from the sombre phantoms of the past.
So, for a while, the future seemed secure,
Dejection folly, aspiration sure.
But changeless change has brought us gloomier times—
Old-world corruption, world-old human crimes,
Greed, lust and villainy—a world wherein
Man crawls again, laden with mortal sin.
Was Channing, then, only a dreamer, too,
Of lovelier dreams than elder dreamers knew?
Some faint hearts deem so; but one clarion voice
Through forty years has bid us all "Rejoice!
What though this world look worse than Channing taught?
Pierce through its surface with the darts of thought,
And virtue rooted there shall prove you still
How human good surpasses human ill!"

As Edwards, holding Channing's precepts true,
Preached them to practice, made them live anew,
So Eliot now asserts our happier state,
Edwards of Channing—each securely great.

In all his strength he lays his burden down,
Serene in faith that future years shall crown
His labours to their end. Another face
Shall henceforth fill his long-accustomed place;
And Lowell's buoyant coming lays all fears
For Harvard in her new, increasing years.
Sprung from a steadfast race whose virtues shine
Clear on our starry rolls, the sixth in line
Father to son, his words and deeds foretell
Bold words to come and deeds done bravely well.
So heralded, wherever he has shown
His presence, there already he is known
Clear-eyed, clear-voiced, pure-hearted—augury
That as he is, so he shall always be
Sure of our hearts. He cannot rise above
The sweet reality of human love.

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